

Lights up when plugged in, the superpower of disability: An arts-based narrative

by

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B.A., Emporia State University, 2000

M.S., Emporia State University, 2001

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AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Special Education, Counseling, and Student Affairs

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Manhattan, Kansas

2017



## **Abstract**

The purpose of this case study was to explore how two people with language-based learning disabilities, who have graduated from Masters of Fine Arts Master's (MFA) programs describe their coping mechanisms, career aspirations, and identity development as a result of being involved in the creative arts. This qualitative study was conducted with purposeful and criterion-based sampling. The participants must have graduated from a MFA program with a focus on a studio art and have a language-based learning disability. Arts-based narrative inquiry research was used to explore the manner in which each participant negotiated their path through multiple educational settings from K-12 to a terminal master's degree. The participants' narratives were articulated using a Bildungsroman format to share their coming of age story as their identities developed.

Findings indicate the participants with language-based learning disabilities used multiple coping mechanisms to negotiate their path through the education settings they encountered as they grew into adults and completed terminal MFA degrees. They relied on extra time, isolation, help from others, and their creativity in an attempt to hide their language-based learning disabilities.

The study raised implications about the amount of support students with learning disabilities have at each level of education. It also raised questions about what help students with disabilities need for long term success as they transition from one level of education to the next, this includes mental health support.

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Approved by:

Major Professor  
Dr. Warren White

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## **Acknowledgements**

To Dr. Bhattacharya, thank you for believing in me when I did not believe in myself. You have pushed me harder and to a level that I did not know was possible. Your support in classes, at writing retreats, and in life in general has changed my life for the better. I love the community you have helped to create that is supportive of early career scholars. Thank you to my committee members, Drs. Mercer, White, Teagarden, and Griffin for your support. A special thank you to Dr. Mercer who helped me transition into this program when I was lost and needed to find my way. To the other students in the qualitative dissertation group, your support and guidance has been irreplaceable. You were there when I needed to cry, laugh, get called out, run ideas past, and know that I was not alone in this long arduous process. Lifelong friendships develop from going through this process together. I want to thank Declan and Josephine for opening up to me and sharing your stories and life with me. I could not have done this work without you. Thank you to Josh, Amanda, and Ned for helping me with images and wrapping my head around parts of the art world necessary to finish this work.

## **Dedication**

To Brecken and Deegan: You are my favorite. I will now be able to be your mom and not have homework to do.

To Ned: Thank you for introducing me to your world of art. Thank you for putting up with all of my questions and conversations about art and research. Thanks for all of the editing and formatting of images. You helped me get information from my head down on paper. Thank you for taking me to see the bison and for sending images when I could not see them myself. Thank you for believing in me when I couldn't and for loving me through this difficult phase of my life. I cannot express how much you mean to me. Thank you for being you and for loving me.

To my parents and brother: Thank you to my mom who read each page of this document and provided feedback. I could not have done this work without support from you, dad and Tom. You helped take care of the boys and allowed me to be me even when it did not make sense. Thank you for encouraging me to keep learning and to keep going to school. Without the belief that I could do anything, I would not have even attempted to work on some of the goals I have now achieved.

To my Grandparents: Grandma and Grandpa you helped me to understand the importance an education despite any setback. You can now plan the long-awaited trip to graduation

## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

Higher education students with language-based learning disabilities enroll as art students, however, little is known about how or if their disabilities affect them in their classes and if so which ones (Stage & Milne, 1996) or if they choose art majors as a way to cope with their disabilities. This qualitative arts-based narrative inquiry research will explore the experiences of two students with learning disabilities who completed a master's program in the fine arts. Specifically, the study is aimed to create a dialogic space to bring forth the issues associated with learning disabilities of graduates of MFA programs, the role of arts for people with learning disabilities, and the ways in which the stigma of learning disabilities influence the life experiences of graduates of art programs. Given that the inquiry will be driven by focusing on the role of art in the lives of participants with learning disabilities, this qualitative research is also informed by arts-based research in education, where art is used as a legitimate site of inquiry in understanding, documenting, analyzing, and representing experiences and the interpretation of meanings of those experiences.

This study is layered with various forms of arts-based approaches as part of the inquiry. There are several reasons for such framing. More than likely those who use art, and elect to study art, do so to use art as a medium of expression to produce emotion from their audience (Becker, 1974; Costache, 2012). However, it is unclear at the onset what those expressions might be and how might they be understood and interpreted through art. Art-informed inquiry has to play a key role in this study for three reasons. First, artistic expressions are the substantive focus of the study. Artistic expressions are the ways in which those expressions may reflect the experiences

of students with learning disabilities. Second, the specific artistic products created by the participants will serve as data for the study to provide information about how disability has affected their educational path. Third, inquiry then needs to explore art as a site of knowledge and meaning making through approaches that allow for such inquiry, such as arts-based research. To that end, an arts-based approach to research will be used in this dissertation (elaborated later in this chapter).

### **Humanistic Educational Research**

This research is based in humanistic educational research rooted in the ideas of the psychologists Eric Ericson, Carl Rogers, and Abraham Maslow that recognizes the receiver of education as a human first and as a learner second (Khatib, Sarem, & Hamidi, 2013). It is important to recognize the whole person rather than the characteristics that make up the person as Khatib et al. continued. Humanistic educational research as described by Russo (1995) as

a holistic, humanistic perspective leads one to social concern and commitment as acts of the total person and not simply as a matter of the application of knowledge and reason.

This idea of the development of empathy as necessary for the development of personal and social responsibility has been a long held principle of humanistic educators. (p.76)

Common characteristics of humanistic educational research include using person first language and interactions with art and creativity. The key tenets of this type of framing include promoting positive self-direction and independence, developing the ability to take responsibility for what is learned, developing creativity, curiosity, and having an interest in arts (Gage & Berliner, 1991). Each of the key tenants will be used throughout various stages of the proposed research. Each relate well with the study of psychology and learning, because thoughts, feelings, and emotions are at the forefront of all human development (Lei, 2007). The humanistic educational



“processes are described as a series of progressive changes which optimize the potential of the student toward the goal of the inherent purposes, internal organization and creativity” (Khatib, 2013, p. 45). Recent humanistic treatments have found that focusing on emotions can help people with learning disabilities (Freilich & Schechtman, 2010). By looking at the changes, emotions, and creativity of the participants as they negotiated their educational careers, using humanistic educational research will relate well with the use of identity development, *Bildung* (personal educational growth), and arts-based narrative inquiry. Each of which are explained in detail within the first three chapters of this document.

### **Writing in First Person**

Writing in first person is common in qualitative research; it is personable and more engaging (Saldaña, 2011). This project is grounded in constructivist epistemology. Thus, the researcher and the participants are engaged in constructing meaning of the experiences shared with artistic expression. The researcher is also the data collector, analyst, and representor. Therefore, it is imperative that there is a critical gaze that the researcher puts on herself in order to remain intellectually rigorous and transparent. Such gaze is driven by the assumption that the researcher is intertwined in the research conducted. The premise of this entanglement is that the human interaction between the researcher and the researched is not separate from the researcher’s humanity. Therefore, it is intellectually expected for the researcher to depict first person narratives and justification, instead of posturing through a neutral trope of discourse.

Additionally, writing in first person often makes the material easier to understand (American Psychological Association, 2010). Using first person in this work extends beyond qualitative research. In academic writing, the APA publication manual recommends avoiding the ambiguity that comes with speaking in third person and passive voice. The APA publication

manual, instead recommends that authors use personal pronouns such as I (as the sole author) for clarity (American Psychological Association, 2010).

### **Deficit Perspectives**

The findings presented here are not done to reinforce deficit perspectives. However, social structures of oppression often promote deficit perspectives and those who are at the receiving end of such characterization often internalizes these perspectives. Therefore, as findings are presented in this study, the participants' internalization of deficit perspectives became clear. However, it is not my intent to promote deficit perspectives but to show how these power structures that create and cultivate deficit perspectives play out in the participants' lives even when they are extremely talented individuals. For example, Josephine, a participant with language-based learning disability, in the study, 60 years old, did not get accommodation services while growing up and internalized the label of being retarded. And even to this day, running a successful studio business, being an accomplished artist, she still frames her identity to some extent from these deficit perspectives. Therefore, as a researcher, it is my obligation to reveal such lingering of oppressive structures, not to reinforce any deficit-based characterization of Josephine, but to highlight the lifelong consequences of these oppressive power structures.

### **Subjectivity**

Qualitative researchers know it is best to disclose their role in research, including values, beliefs, and background to help frame the lens through which they view life (Vagle, 2014). This is typically done in a subjectivity statement within the research. Recognizing subjectivity is an honest way to represent research. Peshkin (1988) describes subjectivity as a garment that cannot be removed; it is present in the research and non-research aspects of life. It is necessary to situate the researcher's perspectives that inform the study.

The lens through which I view the world, and specifically this research, is from an educated white middle class background living in the United States of America. Education has always been a priority for me. My parents are both PK-12 educators who have obtained graduate degrees in the field. I have been able to obtain multiple graduate degrees in the field of education and am currently working on an educational doctorate in special education. Additionally, I have worked in PK-12 settings as a paraprofessional, substitute, and as a school psychologist. I currently work in a publicly funded higher education setting teaching graduate students in the area of special education. In addition to courses in special education, I have also taught counseling and psychology course at the university level.

In addition to my interest and focus in the field of education, I have a strong attraction to the creative arts. I have always been interested in the area of creative arts. I took a few art courses as a child and was on the art history team in high school. However, my interest did not become particularly strong until the last few years. I am particularly interested in how individuals choose a career in the creative arts. This interest started when I met my partner. He is currently an assistant professor of art. We began dating while he was earning his MFA in ceramics and sculpture. This caused me to become interested in hearing the stories of artists (and others) and how they have negotiated their career path. I assume much of my interest is related to my training as a school psychologist and interest in psychology.

When I enrolled this doctoral program, my first class was a qualitative research class. In this class, we were introduced to arts-based research. I had never heard of such a process. Prior to this course, I had made my way through multiple quantitative research courses and never felt any satisfaction. I understand the importance of quantitative research. I have not been drawn to completing my own quantitative research. However, once I researched and read more about arts-

based research, I felt I had found an amazing way to express myself in research. Arts-based qualitative research “clicked” with my thinking. Arts-based research drew me in in a manner that quantitative research did not.

My research in the area of arts-based research and artistic techniques has increased with time. In 2015, I audited an undergraduate basic art design class in order to increase my knowledge and skill in the area of art. A few of the concepts that were introduced were painting, paper cutting, drawing, use of patterns, negative and positive space, color concepts, the importance of using a sketch book, and critique of our own and each other’s work. In addition to the topics outlined in the syllabus for the class, I learned to stretch myself. Additionally, I started to recognize how the thinking process of working through art works. I also have started to recognize and overcome some of the limitations I put on myself instead of avoiding taking chances. One of the most important concepts I learned in this course is the process of having patience with my skills and myself. I need to allow time for the project to develop and for me to complete the work. The process is not automatic. The two black and white and grayscale photos in this chapter are examples of work that I created during the art course.

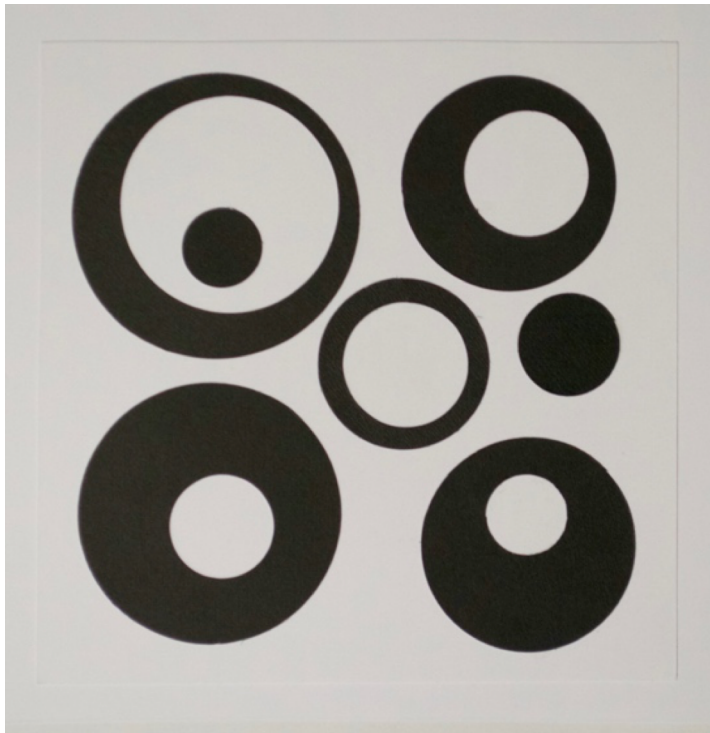
**Figure 1.1 Super Kitty Wechsler B.**



*Figure 1.1.* This image is of a project completed when I took a basic design class to help learn some introductory art skills and terms. Photo by J. Novak, (2016, Spring). Super Kitty Wechsler B. [photograph]. Copyright 2016.

The image above is an example of an art project I completed. It is 11 shades of gray I painted on Bristol board. The Bristol board was then cut with an X-Acto Knife to make the image seen above. This project helped me to understand shading and tones varying from black to white.

**Figure 1.2 Bubbly**



*Figure 1.2.* This is an image of one of eleven personality traits designed in the basic design course. It was created using only black paper, paper cutting tools and a black background. Photo by J. Novak, (2016) *Bubbly* [photograph]. Copyright 2016.

The image above is of a project representing one self-identified personality trait from a group of nine. It is matted white Bristol board with cut black circles to represent one of nine personality traits. This project helped me to understand positive and negative space, as well as symmetry. Additionally, I became skilled at using the X-Acto knife.

In addition to valuing education and having a strong interest the creative arts, I am also a mother of two boys. Each boy has a background of struggling with reading and writing to differing degrees. One of my children is labeled as having a significant language-based learning

disability. I have advocated for his educational needs as he has progressed in the PK-12 system. This child is interested and involved in the creative arts. Despite his trouble with basic fluency while reading, he curated his first art show at the age of 10 for the art walk sponsored by the local arts council. This is atypical for a 10-year-old, let alone one labeled with a significant language-based learning disability. While he struggled with reading and writing, he excels in the creative arts. He struggles to sit through instruction in his fifth-grade classroom. However, I have watched him pay uninterrupted attention to a visiting artist at the local university in a lecture intended for faculty, advanced and graduate art students. Obviously, I find this fascinating. I want to gain a better understanding of how the creative arts can play in lives of those that struggle so much in other areas of learning. This research helped me to begin this process of understanding.

### **Learning Disability in Higher Education**

Learning disability in higher education is not only poorly understood, but creates significant problems for students who have been identified as having such disabilities (Lovett, Nelson, & Lindstrom, 2015). Three key problems have been highlighted in higher education when it comes to learning disabilities (Miskovic & Gabel, 2012; Stage & Milne, 1996; & Wolf, 2011). These three problems include: a) students are responsible to self-disclose their disabilities and often do not because of a fear of being stigmatized, b) higher education lacks a consistent definition of disability, and c) there is a lack of understanding by faculty and staff at universities in terms of how to respond to the needs of students with learning disabilities.

To receive accommodations and services at the university level students must choose to tell their professors or other appropriate staff members in the higher education about their disabilities (Miskovoc & Gabel, 2012). Because there can be a stigma to having a disability,

they do not often report and their disabilities go unrecognized (Harris, 2015). Since students fail to report their disabilities to university officials, it is safe to assume there are greater numbers of students with learning disabilities on campus than is known, making it difficult for faculty and staff to provide accommodations and support for all of the possible areas of needs (Couzens et al. 2015). This puts the universities in a challenging position to serve students appropriately.

Higher education lacks a consistent definition of disability. Wolf (2001) states, “The diagnostic boundaries of hidden disabilities are unclear” (p. 392). Disability definitions vary wildly when considering both visible and invisible disabilities. For example, depression could be considered a learning disability but is not considered so consistently (Cabello, Caballero, Chatterji, Cieza, & Ayuso-Mateos, 2014). Moreover, even within what is considered a learning disability, there is a wide variation of acceptance. For example, certain learning disabilities are more widely accepted than other disabilities, such as anxiety or depression (Ison, et al., 2010). This research project will focus only on learning disabilities in higher education.

While some disabilities have clear definitions or criteria that must be met in order to define them, such as traumatic brain injury or autism spectrum disorders, many such as specific learning disabilities, anxiety disorders, and other mental and medical concerns leave more room for error in diagnosis (Muller, 2011). This is true in PK-12 schools, where special education law is much clearer than in higher education where the same protections of the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEIA) do not apply. Special education law in PK-12 education include such protections as having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in place at school, due process, and other related services (IDEA Parent Guide, 2006). Because of the lack of consensus in the manner in which learning disabilities among college students are labeled, accommodations may not match the actual needs of the individual student (Weis, Sykes, & Unadkat, 2012). This



lack of consistency makes it difficult to identify and provide the appropriate support to students with learning disabilities in higher education.

As stated, learning disability in post-secondary schools is not only poorly understood, but creates severe problems for students who do not identify themselves having such disabilities. These key problems continue to be obstacles for those with learning disabilities; students must self-disclose their disabilities and often do not because of a fear of being stigmatized, there is not consistent definition of disability, and all faculty and staff at universities do not have the knowledge to support the needs of students with learning disabilities. This can cause frustration for busy students and faculty alike.

### **Role of Arts in Peoples' Lives with a Learning Disability**

Many helping professions, such as medicine, therapy, and education, understand the importance of using art as a way to help and serve those who are struggling in life. Art therapy is a valuable method of helping those with educational impairments to improve mental health and emotional well-being, encourage change from within, and self-awareness (Blomdahl, Gunnarsson, Guregård, & Björklund, 2013; Haeyen, van Hooren, & Hutschemaekers, 2015; What is art therapy?, 2013). The field of art therapy is “recognized for art-making allowing one to reframe experiences, reorganize thoughts, and gain personal insights that often enhanced one’s quality of life. Art therapy has gained popularity because it combines free artistic expression with the potential for significant therapeutic intervention” (Konopka, 2014, p. 73). Among others, psychologists, therapists, and special educators are using the arts in practice due to healing, restorative, and empowering qualities (Leavy, 2015). For example, Leavy (2015) explains that there is an increase among health researchers and practitioners to explore the mental, psychological, and physical health improvements of dance and movement using arts-

based research. Thorley (2011) shared her experience recovering from a traumatic brain injury while completing her Ph.D. using painting as an arts-based method of art therapy to uncover new ways of using art to enhance her life experiences, which gave her hope and inspired health care professionals and other afflicted people. Painting during her rehabilitation from surgery helped her to express her feelings and aid in her healing.

While painting can be used to help healing, it is increasingly accepted to use this and other art forms to aid in the of improving a variety of conditions, including learning disabilities (Bell, Terry, & Edelson, 2012). Bell et al. (2012) share a story from Lawrence Carter-Long, a disability advocate who has been part of a dance company:

Disability in our culture is allowed to be inspirational. We're allowed to be heroic.

We're sometimes allowed to be pathetic. What we're not allowed to be is creative.

Fortunately, this is changing. There is a vast world of artistic expression now open for individuals with disabilities to contribute to fully, and benefit from in return. From physical, mental, and emotional improvements to the community and individual growth that comes from artistic experiences, the arts heal and enrich the lives of all who participate, including the audience. (p. 54)

Using creative arts can be used to help those with disabilities to express themselves in ways that highlight their strengths. As stated above, not only can the person with a disability benefit but also the audience that experiences the creative expression. This may lead to better understanding among people. Additionally, using art as a healing modality as well as a generative practice can lead to empowerment and expression of people who carry with them the stigma of learning disability (Derby, 2009).

Encouraging well-being and health for those with disabilities is the focus of art therapy. The differing methods of artistic expression allow for those with learning disabilities to express themselves in manners that best fit their strengths and may help them to divert focus from the disability. By allowing those with learning disabilities to express themselves for an audience, it could be a gateway of understanding how people negotiate their learning disabilities and what support systems can be provided to individuals on a micro and macro level in higher education. Moreover, the aesthetics of art allow for a reflexivity that might otherwise not be present or preferable to people with learning disabilities. Perhaps in some ways, if one is unable to control one's learning disabilities, somehow developing an art practice can become something one can control while expressing oneself (Daily, 1984).

### **Arts-based Research in Education**

Arts-based research is a method of inquiry used in many fields including education, therapy, and health research to enhance engagement by research participants and audiences (Boydell, Gladstone, Volpe, Allemang, & Stasiulis, 2012). Arts-based research has been defined by some as a systematic use of the artistic process to help understand and examine the artistic experience (Atkins, 2012). Yet, the artistic process is not to be understood as linear or causal. Instead, it is to be understood as reflexive, generative, and interpretive. Art as inquiry has many names in current literature; Autoethnography, arts-based research, arts-based inquiry, and Performative Social Science are only a few of the terms (Jones & Leavy, 2014; Leavy, 2015, Springgay & Irwin, 2005). Barone and Eisner (2011) state that “arts-based research is an effort to extend beyond the limiting constraints of discursive communication in order to express meanings that otherwise would be ineffable” (p.1). In other words, information and meaning might not be as present or as effective in text-based discourses. Moreover, Leavy (2015) states,

“Arts-based research practices are a set of methodological tools used by researchers across the disciplines during all phases of social research, including data generation, analysis, interpretation, and representation” (p. 4). Multilayered inquiry may be needed to create an expansive understanding and the creative genres can then be used as modes of inquiry, methodology, analysis, and representation.

Additionally, several arts-based educational research scholars [Barone & Eisner (2011), Leavy (2015), Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, and Grauer (2006)], emphasize the benefits of arts-based research in education include using creative arts to gather information from participants, improving the field of education, and encouraging collaboration across academic disciplines. For example, by using art as inquiry, connections are made between thinking, experiences, ideas, and emotions thus pushing new openings, possibilities, and especially understandings between the participants and the audience no matter from what discipline they come (Pourchier, 2010). Supporting the idea that artistic genres can move beyond text-based understanding and information, McNiff (2011) explains, “using art as a means of psychological inquiry grew from practical experiences in therapy and education where the core premise was that artistic expression could further understanding and resolve difficulties in ways not accessible to spoken language” (p. 389). There are ways in which arts-based research can engage the participants, the researcher, and the audience that can exceed traditional research approaches into something more expansive, with multiple strategies of inquiry and understanding. Art inquiry adds richness to research and writing by extending research into multiple directions by playing with form and content to provoke people into discussing and identifying solutions to posed problems and/or questions (Bhattacharya, 2013). Several approaches can be taken when considering arts-based inquiry. In many cases, the artistic work is created at the data analysis and

representation stages. For example, Jongeward (1990) explained by Leavy (2015) that during her research process she

made visual images at critical times to gain energy, clarity, and insight. While doing data analysis, (she) created six visual portraits to convey the integrity and diversity of (her) participants' experiences. Making the portraits was significant both as a methodology for interpretation and representation and also as a means to maintain (her) own connection with artistic intuitive ways of knowing. (p. 254)

Bhattacharya (2013) also advocates for an integration of creativity and arts-based inquiry throughout all stages of qualitative research instead of just in the data representation phase. This research did so.

Arts-based inquiry has the same goal as other types of educational research, which is to improve educational practice and policy (Barone & Eisner, 2011) by rendering knowledge that is accessible beyond academic circles, knowledge that is provocative, and can move people to action, thereby connecting theory and practice. Many arts-based researchers are compelled to understand how art can help them to build different relationships in the areas of education for which they are passionate (O'Donoghue, 2015). For example, Hickman (2007) had student teachers in art share their classroom observations using visual art mediums rather than text-based forms of writing. The student teachers reported they enjoyed the process and that it made them think more about their experiences in the classroom than if they had just submitted a written observation report for the assignment. Additionally, Hickman (2007) also stated that he had a better understanding of the experiences of the student teachers because of their visual representations. He was able to understand the saliency of their experiences and how they made connections between various parts of their experiences in the classroom. The arguments

provided are not intended to situate arts-based approaches as superior to other approaches of inquiry, such as journals or face-to-face interviews. However, arts-based approaches allow for engaging multiple senses and have the potential to engage multiple stakeholders of the research in an expansive manner (Smithbell, 2010), and can be intelligible to people within and outside academia, thus making a case for broad impact. This kind of research is intellectually demanding on the inquirer as the relationships between education, art, and research need to be made in some tangible form (Slattery, 2003). The tangible form, once identified or created, can be shared with many different audiences.

Arts-based research is a unique manner of collecting data from participants using qualitative methods grounded in and driven by the creative arts. Using arts-based research to approach data collection has gained recognition as a legitimate and useful methodological approach by eliciting and sharing the experiences and understandings that are not always available when completing traditional forms of research when looking at the relationship between art and learning (Greenwood, 2012). The use of arts-based research is shifting the understanding of what is involved in creating new knowledge (Boydell et al., 2012). For example, A/r/tography is a form of arts-based research that is based in both of the fields of education and art that will help provide insight into the life stories of the research participants (Irwin, Beer, & Springgay, 2006).

For the reasons explained earlier, this study will use art as the substantive focus as well as a legitimate site of inquiry incorporating the creative arts in research design, data collection, analysis, and representation. The reason for such a choice is that participants with learning disabilities negotiate and mediate how they present and express themselves to the world, how they handle the stigma that comes with the learning disability, and what narratives they share

publicly and privately. Given such sharing and interpretation of information occur in multilayered form, with some stories that remain fully visible, some partially visible, and some totally learning, it is critical that a framework is used to present this multiplicity. In this study, information will be collected from participants who have completed an MFA degree about their artistic processes and how they understand, negotiate, and cope with their disability in relation to their art. Visual images have the potential to provide metaphor, analogy, and richness of information (Gouzouasis, Irwin, Miles, & Gordon, 2013). The participants will be invited to share their thoughts and intentions in order to gather information about their disability about their visual representations (creative artworks) in their chosen creative art medium. For example, the participants were ceramicists, painters, and graphic designers.

The practice of arts-based research differs from other forms of research because the results of the inquiry are represented in artistic form, such as drawing, painting, or sculpture (What is art therapy?, 2013), to serve as a way to stimulate further conversations in education (Pintanida, McMahon, & Garman, 2003). Pintanida et al. (2003) continues by explaining that conversations about educational policy, self-exploration, modes of representing knowledge, and modes of pedagogy are four of the themes that art researchers in education tend to focus. This research focused on self-exploration as it can offer catharsis for those that have had troubling experiences by allowing participants to express their knowledge in a format familiar to them. Additionally, the self-exploration can lend to modes of representing knowledge in some artistic format that can inform pedagogies within and outside education. By using art to allow participants to express their emotions and knowledge in hope of revealing information about how they cope with a disability, arts-based research allows for sharing that may not occur in other forms of data collection. For example, arts-based researchers gather information from

participants using creative methods. In addition, they may express the results of the research in a creative manner such as a play, poetry, or other visual art format to inform readers. Using creative arts to gather information from participants can add new information to the field of education. Arts-based research is redefining the certain qualitative methods of data collection to improve the field of education. Participants are able to express themselves in creative ways, expanding the breadth of information collected thus providing new understandings. Additionally, arts-based researchers are able to use creative methods of expression to share the results of their studies with wider audiences.

The use of arts-based research is shifting the understanding of what is involved in creating new knowledge (Boydell et al. 2012). Artists with disabilities often draw upon their lived experiences (Ware, 2011) in many situations it is likely they express these experiences with their artistic expression. With learning disabilities, there comes an accepted silence, perhaps as if it is a natural corollary (Banks, 1996). By using art as a way to interrupt that silence, this study has promise to open up spaces of understanding of how people with such disabilities understand and author their lives. Additionally, such understanding when enhanced through rich, artistic modalities bears promises to have interdisciplinary appeal and can speak to ways in which members within the higher education community can engage in discussions about learning disabilities in an embodied, empathic manner. Using an arts-based research method can empower and change the manner in which data has been collected in the past (Springgay & Irwin, 2005) and expand one's field substantively and methodologically.

### **Rationale for this Study**

As stated, some higher education students with learning disabilities enroll as art students, however, little is known about how or if their disabilities affect them in their classes and overall



education (Stage & Milne, 1996) or if they choose art as a career as a way to cope with their disabilities. In order to gain a better understanding of these students, additional research was necessary. By using arts-based research to gather information, academic conversations about students with learning disabilities who also study art will become more informed. Because some artists with disabilities have lived a variety of experiences involving disabilities and produce visual produce artworks to share with other, arts-based research is a logical manner to conduct research (Ware, 2011). Arts-based research is the use of the actual art-making process as a primary way to understand and examine experiences of artists (Knowles & Cole, 2008). Arts-based research will provide a framework for data collection. By using arts-based research as a methodological process for acquiring data, understandings and experiences that are not fully accessible through more traditional research approaches will be discovered (Greenwood, 2012).

There is limited research on students with learning disabilities in higher education (Stage & Milne, 1996). More specifically, few studies have researched the learning and coping techniques that students with disabilities use in higher education (Heiman, & Precel, 2003). Furthermore, few studies have investigated how art students in higher education deal with their learning disabilities. This research will help to add to the literature by exploring the possibility that the participants' artwork could provide an additional medium for analyzing and understanding ways in which art helps certain students cope with their disability.

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this case study is to explore how two people with language-based learning disabilities, who have graduated from MFA programs describe their coping mechanisms, career aspirations, and identity development as a result of being involved in the creative arts.

This study addressed three research questions:

1. In what ways do the participants describe their coping mechanisms (to mitigate their language-based learning disabilities) in relationship to their experiences in creative arts?
2. How did the participants arrive at their career aspirations as a result of negotiating their language-based learning disabilities in the creative arts?
3. What practices did the participants engage in that contributed to their identity development as art professionals with language-based learning disabilities?

## **Methodology**

This research was completed using qualitative methods to gather information from the participants' point of view in their art and interviews. Studies using qualitative methods are "open-ended and are designed to lead the researcher into unforeseen areas of discovery within the lives of people being investigated in a specific social setting rather than in broad populations" (Holliday, 2012, p. 5). In order for participants to openly share stories about experiences, successes, and struggles in higher education it is necessary for them to be able to disclose information to me openly without having the more structured and forced choice questions that quantitative research may include. Qualitative research methods allowed my research participants to share the stories of their world in a natural and open manner. Jones (1995) explains

Qualitative research begins by accepting that there is a range of different ways of making sense of the world and is concerned with discovering the meanings seen by those who are being researched and with understanding their view of the world rather than that of the researchers. (p. 2)

By gathering and telling the stories about the lived experiences of individual research participants, there are tremendous opportunities to learn from their experiences and emotions. Information that was once covered becomes uncovered and shared in an excavation of self (Harman, 2007). It is relevant to this study to find out about the individual experiences about art majors because experiences with learning disabilities are so unique. By using qualitative approaches to gather the stories of struggle and experience from art majors with learning disabilities, inconsistencies or shortcomings in higher education may be found (Holliday, 2012).

Gathering these stories through qualitative approaches is valued because it serves as a way to understand an experience rather than formulate a scientific explanation (Kramp, 2014).

To understand the experiences of the participants better, a qualitative arts-based approach to the research will be utilized to gather information. Arts-based research allows for the use of using visual art forms as data. By using visual art forms as data, seemingly mundane forms of information can become something more; the information tends to be more engaging and grabs the attention of others (Hickman, 2007). This method of data collection will allow verbal and visual information to be gathered in such a way that the stories of the participants will be told in an engaging manner. Leavy (2015) explains how the intersection of arts-based and qualitative research are beneficial to educational research,

Arts-based research offers ways to tap into what would otherwise be inaccessible, make connections and interconnections that are otherwise out of reach, ask and answer new research questions, explore old research questions in new ways, and represent research differently, often more effectively with respect to reaching broad audiences and nonacademic stakeholders....In short, ABR cultivates new insights and illuminates aspects of the social world and human experience, as do quantitative and qualitative research, but in different ways. (p. 21)

Discovering and describing information from research participants from a slightly different angle is a key tenet of arts-based research. As described above, arts-based research is the use of the actual artwork and the art-making process as a primary way to understand and examine experiences of participants in an engaging manner, especially artists (Knowles & Cole, 2008). This research begins to fill this gap in the literature by telling the stories of art graduate school completers with learning disabilities and their struggles, if any, in higher education. I

interviewed the participants, had participants create a creative arts bag portrait (Bhattacharya, 2016), and had them share their artwork with me as data for this study. My research questions will focus on how their exceptionality influences their chosen career path in the creative arts, motivates them in their area of art, and has affected them in their overall educational life. Each of these types of data provided insight into the student's work and life history. Additionally, an arts-based data analysis occurred helping determine my results using themes of importance after data collection. This information was beneficial as it will add to the literature regarding the students that major in art with learning disabilities in higher education by using arts-based research as a primary method of inquiry.

### **Methodological Framework: Arts-Based Narrative Inquiry**

The methodological framework for this study was be arts-based narrative inquiry (ABNI). Arts-based narrative inquiry takes place at the trinity of arts-based research, narrative inquiry, and arts-based narrative inquiry. The intersection of these three methods combine creativity and storytelling to help the reader gain a clearer picture of the life experiences of the participants. When combining art, education, disability, and identity development as major areas of study, the use of arts-based narrative inquiry will provide insight that other areas of qualitative work may not. Elliot Eisner and Tom Barone, main figures in legitimizing arts-based research in academia, strongly advocate for arts-based research to be used in the field of education while also encouraging the use of narrative inquiry (Kim, 2016). For this particular research, visual arts-based research will be completed to share the experiences and emotions of the participants in education. It is critical to remember that using visual arts is not new to research. Anthropologists and sociologists have been using pictures and other visual images since before

the 1960's (Kim, 2016). Images have long helped readers by providing information and visual examples when accompanying text to help understanding.

### **Appropriateness to Study**

Using arts-based narrative inquiry as the framework for this study allowed questions to be asked related to the participants' experiences in college related to their exceptionality. It allowed open-ended qualitative questions to be asked related to the participants' exceptionality and how it affects them in their general education and their art coursework. Additionally, participants were able to share how their exceptionality affects their artwork and if it is expressed or reflected in their artwork. Use of this framework allowed the researcher to describe the personal day-to-day interactions the participants have with others related to their exceptionality.

Using arts-based narrative inquiry as the theoretical framework for this study allowed the researcher to try to understand participants' perspectives. The focus of ABNI is to have art go together with narrative to communicate the meaning of stories that are told during the process (Kim, 2016). Kim (2016) goes on to explain the basic tenets of ABNI:

1. Art accompanies narratives to convey the meaning of stories that are told and retold.
2. The ways of creating art are incorporated into the whole process of conducting narrative inquiry. Thinking, collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and producing the product each incorporate art during the research process.
3. Empathy is necessary for understanding meaning in human life and the arts elicit empathic understanding because of their evocative and compelling nature.
4. ABNI researchers write stories or produce visual representations as a research product.

In addition to using arts-based narrative inquiry as the methodological framework for this study, identity development was used as the conceptual framework and was also addressed.

### **Conceptual Framework: Identity Development and Bildung**

The conceptual framework for this study was identity development and Bildung (educating oneself). Because the participants in this research were asked to share information about their educational experiences while growing up using the development of identity as a way to frame the study seems logical. Bildung complements identity development nicely because it is a manner used to describe the resilience, persistence, and vulnerability of the personal growth process (Kim, 2016). Kim (2016) continues, “Bildungsroman, thus, is a story of one’s Bildung that focuses on cultivating and forming one’s disposition of mind involving intellectual and moral development. It is a story of developing oneself as part of the journey of becoming” (p. 127). Sharing about the journey of how learning disabilities has effected the participants as they moved through the educational systems is key to answering the research questions posed.

The key tenets of identity development and Bildung described above define exactly what a conceptual framework is for me as a researcher. Conceptual frameworks are used to capture real information that makes it easy for others to apply or work with the information (Jabareen, 2008). As a researcher, I gathered information about how my participants negotiated their path through PK-12 and higher education with a language-based learning disability. It was not known prior to beginning the research when each of the participants discovered or suspected that they had a disability. It may have been early in their educational experiences or more recent. By sharing information in a coming-of-age story that discusses all of the stages of identity development rather than only focusing on the disability will give a more holistic picture of their journey. I also feel strongly about looking at people as whole. People are not their disability. I

would never refer to a person as that “autistic person.” If it were necessary to discuss their disability, I would always refer to them in person first language. I may say that “person with autism” to be more respectful. Using identity development and Bildung as a conceptual framework provide an avenue to share many aspects of the participants’ educational journeys. While language-based learning disabilities will be a focus of the research, it is not the only information that will be disclosed throughout this process.

### **Limits and Possibilities of the Study**

This research investigated the lived experiences of two graduates of a Master’s of Fine Art studio program whom have a learning disability. This study contributed to how students with learning disabilities successfully navigate in higher education to obtain a career in the creative arts. Additionally, this study allowed data to be viewed from multiple perspectives and demonstrated how people communicate with the world using multiple approaches.

A purposeful sampling of participants was utilized. As a novice researcher, it is necessary for me to develop strong interview skills. This required practice and guidance on my part to develop rapport, build trust, listen actively, and be able to elicit information rich stories. I practiced and relied on my psychology skills and training to mitigate this situation. Because I have training in psychology and am familiar with this role, I will have to ensure that I do not play the role of a counselor but that I am only participating in the role of the researcher. To mitigate I journaled, meet with my dissertation committee members, and my methodologist to correct myself as the research progresses. Additionally, another limitation is the amount of time the participants were allowed for conversation and the time I can invest in developing deep rich meaningful interpretations. Guidelines for this were established in the beginning of the research



process but will require flexibility and consultation with committee members for guidance as the research process takes place.

### **Operationalization of Constructs**

1. Art Classes- Art classes are defined as studio art classes such as ceramics, painting, sculpture, photography, graphic design, drawing, or printmaking
2. Arts-based Narrative Inquiry- Arts-based narrative inquiry is narrative inquiry that uses the arts to enhance and deepen research, which literary-based (literary storytelling) and visual-based (visual storytelling) narrative inquiry (Kim, 2016).
3. Arts-based Research: Arts-based research is defined as systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience that both researchers and the people they involve with their studies (Atkins, 2012).
4. Bildung- Bildung, a German pedagogical term with the sense of ‘educating oneself,’ refers to some of the most complex human activities. Education is essential for furthering Bildung (Schneider, 2012).
5. Bildungsroman- Bildungsroman is a story of one’s Bildung, or personal growth, which values the process of one’s self-development through intellectual and moral endeavor involving the complexity and conflicts of humane experience (Kim, 2016).
6. Identity Development- The transition between childhood and full adulthood is a critical developmental period shaped by individual, familial, social, and historical circumstances define identity development (Donnellan, Ravert, Luyckx, Zomboanga, & Mistry, 2012).
7. Learning Disabilities- Specific learning disability. General. Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the

imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, intellectual disability, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (IDEA - Building the Legacy of IDEA, 2004).

8. Narrative Inquiry- Narrative Inquiry is a storytelling methodology that inquiries into narratives and stories of people's life experiences (Kim, 2016).
9. Negotiate- Negotiate means to move carefully or with difficulty past, through, or along something (Cambridge Dictionary, 2016).

### **Chapter Summary**

Documentation about higher education students with language-based learning disabilities who complete graduate students in MFA programs is lacking. This study will begin to shed light on how these students negotiate their educational paths helping to fill the gap in the current literature in this area. This new knowledge will be discovered using artistic and creative arts techniques that will be familiar with the participants. The following themes will be addressed a) language-based learning disabilities in higher education, b) the role of art in peoples' lives with a learning disability, and c) arts-based research narrative inquiry.

## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

Higher education students with disabilities enroll as art majors, however, little is known about how or if their disabilities affect them in their classes and their choice of major. The chapter will review the contemporary and historical literature regarding art as inquiry with students with disabilities in higher education art programs. The review is divided into the following sections: identity development, Bildung, college students with learning disabilities, art in therapy, healing, and disability, and finally art in education.

### **Conceptual Framework: Identity Development and Bildung**

#### **Identity Development**

The conceptual framework chosen for this research is identity development. Development of one's own identity happens throughout life (Owen, 2012). However, as people transition from adolescence to adulthood, developing a sense of personal identity is a formative developmental task that takes place while people are considering their choice of partners, careers, education level, and religious beliefs (Richie et al., 2013). Many of these important decisions are made during the period of life in which many students are in college. College is a critical time for development; interests become more crystalized due to course work and employment during this period (Sung, Turner, & Kaewchinda, 2012). It is important for those in higher education to understand that development of identity is still taking place in the students they serve. "College is a prime location where students begin the transition from the role of student to the role of professional" (Kaufman, 2012, p. 38). Obviously, attending a university plays an important role in the lives of students who are developing their identity.

Identity is often defined as one's personally held beliefs about themselves in relation to social groups such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, exceptionality, and religion (Torres,

Jones, & Renn, 2009). Through this process of identity development, elements such as beliefs develop and help as one grows as a person. Torres et al. (2009) continue by stating that the more faculty and staff in higher education “understand how students make meaning of their identities, the better they are able to assist in promoting student learning and development in higher education institutions.” (p. 578)

As people experience success and failure in their lives, coping strategies help to develop and form identity (Luyckx, Klimstra, Duriez, Schwartz, & Vanhalst, 2012). Identity development is a fluid and ever-changing process that continues throughout life with an abundance of this taking place in adolescence and early adulthood (Chan, 1989).

There are many factors of the shifting identity development to take into consideration. For example,

during the process of identity development, youths will typically experiment with multiple several multiple selves and multiple roles – e.g., good student, daughter of an immigrant, best friend, devout Christian, civil rights activist, smoker, crusading lawyer, shoplifter, pro ball player. Some of these identities will be kept, nurtured, and committed to over a lifetime. Others will be worn and discarded. The key according to theorists of identity development is to integrate these multiple identities into a *coherent* sense of self.

(Conceptual Framework, 2000, p. 6)

In addition to the factors of identity development in late adolescence and emerging adulthood outlined above, Jenson-Arnott (2000) discusses work, love, and worldviews. He continues that while forming identity people try out different possibilities gradually making decisions about their lives that endure into adulthood (Jenson-Arnott, 2000). These possibilities and decisions will likely help to form values and beliefs as identities develop. Ritchie et al. (2013) found that

committing to a set of goals, values, and beliefs that are personally satisfying maybe linked with positive well-being for emerging adults. It seems logical that people have satisfaction that is more personal when they achieve goals aligned with their values and beliefs.

## **Bildung**

One way to frame identity development is with Bildung. The word “Bildung” originates from the word Bildungsroman, which originated as a form of narrative story telling in the late 1700s in Germany that describes a journey through personal fulfillment and demands changes to society (Sameshima, 2007). Because there is not a direct translation from German to English, the words ‘formation,’ ‘self-formation,’ ‘cultivation,’ ‘self-cultivation,’ ‘self-development,’ and ‘cultural process’ are all used to help those that do not speak German understand the meaning of the word. Each of these terms describe the process of identity development. Siljander et al. (2012) continue by pointing out that it is critical to note that Bildung does not happen on its own; it requires education for a person to shape, improve, and develop into a more advanced individual. The centrality of the concept of Bildung is that it is the self-realization of the individual in his or her fullness (Swales, 1978). The concept documents development of a person’s identity while they are coming of age.

Because Bildung and education are so closely interconnected, Bildung can be used to tell the story of students as they develop throughout their educational life and experiences. “The idea of education- both formal, state-sponsored forms and those initiated and developed by individuals for their own aesthetic needs” are all part of Bildung” (Castle, 2006, p. 30). When referring to Bildung it is critical to remember that the word refers to all types of education a person experiences, at school, at home, and other life experiences not just formal education in a school setting. As operationally defined in chapter one, Bildung, a German pedagogical term

with the sense of ‘educating oneself,’ refers to some of the most complex human activities.

Education is essential for furthering Bildung (Schneider, 2012).

von Humbolt (1942 [1792]), one of the most influential officials in German education, wrote in a letter in 1792, The man concerned with only heightening of his powers and the elevation of his personality would find an excellent lesson in this work, which would set out before him, simply and comprehensibly, the influence that every business of life can exercise on our inner Bildung. (p. 60)

Bildung, according to von Humbolt, is a powerful way to develop from one stage of life to the next. Bildungsroman is an excellent manner in which to write about this development. The literary format of Bildungsroman chronologically takes the reader through the main character’s, or protagonist’s, personality development socially, morally, and psychologically (Knoetze & Stroud, 2012). Knoetze and Stroud continue by stating,

Some features of a *Bildungsroman* include: that a chronological order is followed from childhood into the present adulthood; something in the plot, which usually includes hardship, prompts the protagonist to undergo a rite-of-passage; and through this journey they come to manifest the values and lineament of their society, leading them to become a fully-fledged member of that society. (2012, p. 365)

For example, the famous book *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (1960) is written in the Bildungsroman manner. “In *To Kill a Mockingbird* it adopts the perspective of a young girl and shows her maturing in contrast to a prejudiced society, and finally, developing moral values of equality. . . . The Bildungsroman is constantly changing because of new contexts and attitudes in the world” (Kessels, 2014). An example of the use of Bildung in educational research, Kim (2013) used Bildungsroman to document the stories of five teachers lived experiences of using

action research in their classrooms. Kim's (2013) research found that the term *Bildung* captured the professional growth that was made by the teachers as they completed action research in their classrooms.

## **Learning Disabilities in Higher Education**

There are many reasons that students with learning disabilities struggle in higher education. Three of the key problems highlighted in higher education when it comes to learning disabilities (Miskovic & Gabel, 2012; Stage & Milne, 1996; & Wolf, 2011) include: a) students are responsible to self-disclose their disabilities and often do not because of a fear of being stigmatized, b) higher education lacks a consistent definition of disability, and c) there is a lack of understanding by faculty and staff at universities in terms of how to respond to the needs of students with learning disabilities.

Students with disabilities are less likely to attend a four-year degree than their non-disabled peers and only four percent of graduate students have disabilities (NCES, 1996). Only 28 percent of postsecondary students with disabilities disclose their disabilities to officials at the university (Newman, 2012) thus requesting accommodations to meet their needs. One reason that there are more students in higher education who have learning disabilities than have been enrolled in the past is because there are laws to support those with learning disabilities in higher education. Anctil, Ishikawa, & Scott (2008) state that

Postsecondary educational access and opportunities for students with learning disabilities have increased dramatically in the United States due to the passage and enactment of progressive legislation such as the amended Rehabilitation Act of 1998 and the reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education in 2004 and the Americans With Disabilities Act in 1990. (p. 164)

However, it should be noted that students with disabilities are still attending college at a lower rate than their non-disabled peers (Cameto, Knokey, & Sanford, 2011).

### **Disclosure**

Many people with disabilities refuse to disclose this information to others because of the fear of being stigmatized (Berman-Gorvine, 2015). Others do not disclose their disability to university officials because they perceive the office of disabilities is meant to serve students with more significant disabilities than learning disabilities (Couzens et al., 2015). In addition to telling university officials about their disability, they must provide documented information that proves they qualify for services under The Americans with Disabilities Act and/or Section 504 (Miskovic & Gabel, 2012). Participants also reported that either they or their parents had to help fight for appropriate accommodations in college (Anctil et al., 2008). Kaufman (2014) shares

Current focuses in higher education fail to see college students as whole persons. We are so focused on measuring *what* students are learning that we have given very little attention to *who* they are becoming. Students are not just going out into the world as containers of discipline-specific knowledge. They are also going into the world as individuals in the throes of important identity development. (p. 39)

While considering what students are learning and who they are becoming it is also necessary to think about how they will best access the information in their college course work. It was necessary to consider the struggles that take place with students with disabilities.

### **Definition of Disability**

There is no current definition of learning disabilities in higher education as there is in PK-12 (Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs, & Barnes, 2007; Gregg, 2003). Because there is not a consensus of definition it reduces the reliability when identifying students with learning disabilities (Weis,



Sykes, & Unadkat, 2012). The lack of consistency with the definitions of disabilities can cause some confusion with students and those that work in higher education. Most students in higher education are familiar with the protections of the laws of special education that were in place while they were in the high school. Likely they have been involved in some of the transition planning and decision making in high school as they planned to attend college. However, they may not be prepared to advocate for their needs and appropriate access once they begin college. Weis, Dean, and Osborne (2014) state,

Federal laws assist student with disabilities as they transition to college. In primary and secondary school, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) entitles students to special education and other services to help them achieve their highest potential. In college, however, IDEIA no longer applies. (p. 484)

The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA, 2008) and the Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) are laws that were implemented to protect students from discrimination in higher education (Taymans, 2012). However, they do not provide the same services, funding and protections as IDEIA. While IDEIA supports success in PK-12 schools, ADAAA and Section 504 were developed to provide access to education in college but do not guarantee successful outcomes for students with reasonable accommodations (Lovett, Nelson, & Lindstrom, 2014). It is critical for students and those in higher education need to understand the difference in the laws as transitions into higher education occur.

Another area of confusion is that much of the research in higher education identity development does not address students with disabilities. Most of the identity development research in academia takes only into consideration race, gender, and sexual orientation, however, there is beginning to be more fluidity in these areas; disability is still often overlooked (Torres,

Jones, & Renn, 2009). Additionally, the research on university students with learning disabilities is limited and it is critical for additional research to be completed in this area (Pena, 2014; Stage & Milne, 1996). However, Anctil et al. (2008) researched students with disabilities in higher education. Their research found that identity development within this group was highly impacted by the themes of persistence, competence, career decision making and self-realization. Participants in this research reported they learned to cope with the disadvantages of their disabilities and learned from mistakes to help them adjust to college

In 1973, American legislation enacted protections to help those with disabilities to have greater access to higher education with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. This law is often referred to as simply “Section 504.” Section 504 (1973) states that:

A recipient to which this subpart applies shall make such modifications to its academic requirements as are necessary to ensure that such requirements do not discriminate or have the effect of discriminating, on the basis of handicap, against a qualified handicapped applicant or student. Academic requirements that the recipient can demonstrate are essential to the instruction being pursued by such student or to any directly related licensing requirement will not be regarded as discriminatory within the meaning of this section. Modifications may include changes in the length of time permitted for the completion of degree requirements, substitution of specific courses required for the completion of degree requirements, and adaptation of the manner in which specific courses are conducted. (subpart 104.44)

These protections were put in place to help provide access services at the university for students enrolled with disabilities.

In addition to the issues of confusion that may occur when the protections of the student change as they become adults and move into a new educational setting, the definition of learning disability itself can cause confusion. Studies (Lovett, 2014; Sparks & Lovett 2009a; & Sparks & Lovett, 2009b) have shown that there is a lack of validity in the diagnostic labels for learning disabilities. In two of these studies, they found that less than half of 378 students in the study met the criteria for a learning disability and only 7% met the criteria of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V). In another similar study, they found that less than 40% of students in higher education met any definition of learning disability regardless of the criteria used (Sparks & Lovett, 2013). The term ‘learning disabilities’ may tell us more about society and how people are treated because they do not fit into the expectations of society; the term does not really give other information about the individual with the label themselves (Bogdan & Taylor, 1976). The use of the term ‘learning disability’ does not tell anyone the person’s strengths or weaknesses. It is a broad term letting others know this person has significant difficulties in an academic area. The overall vagueness of the term does not help to clarify information for others.

Additional confusion about the labels and diagnoses of learning disabilities exists, selecting the appropriate accommodations for those with learning disabilities can be difficult (Newman et al. 2011). Weis et al. (2016) state that “very little is known about the accommodations afforded to college students with learning disabilities” (p. 485). What is known is only about students that disclose their learning disability in higher education. There is obviously little to no information about those that choose not to discuss their disabilities with officials in higher education. Newman et al. (2011) found that of 87% of high school students with learning disabilities received accommodations only 19% of those students sought

accommodations when enrolled in higher education. In this same research, it was found that the most likely accommodation was extended time for exams, followed by access to a special technology, tutoring, testing in a separate location, a reader, interpreter or a scribe or note taker (Newman et al. 2011). Often it is necessary to help students with learning disabilities succeed they may need special study methods that require extra time and energy which may increase the chances of fatigue (Heiman, 2012). Even when students do get accommodations in higher education, they may not be the appropriate accommodations. Some clinicians may recommend accommodations that do not necessary match the students' needs. For example, they may give someone accommodations on all exams rather than in the area of impairment, or they may give too many accommodations because they want to be helpful and do not fully understand all of the rules that those in higher education should follow (Weis, 2016).

### **Marginalization**

The participants in this study may be considered outsiders to some people as they likely did not meet the educational norms of their peers. The participants have disabilities and may have been treated or considered as an outsider by peers, teachers, or administrators. Students with disabilities are often marginalized by peers (Chen, Hamm, Farmer, Lambert, & Mehtaji 2015). They may have been considered at risk for failure in school or have felt as if their educational struggles were unique and that they did not fit in with the rest of their peers. Under the protection of IDEA, students with exceptionalities are supposed to have access to a similar public education their peers without disabilities. However, this is not always the case. Marginalization often occurs when schools favor institutional empowerment over students' voiced needs (Nordmann, 2001). Adamek and Darrow (2012) state the following:

Students with disabilities face many challenges as they progress through elementary and high school experiences. A student with a disability may be disadvantaged in terms of achieving success with the academic and social demands of today's schools. In addition to the challenges related to disability, students may encounter additional difficulty related to violence in schools, high stakes testing, limited access to general education, and social acceptance and peer pressure. Positive and negative features of the current educational setting affect a student's experience throughout school years and beyond. (p. 103)

Being marginalized or considered an outsider because of a disability should be considered when considering the view of the world the participants in this study may share. One way in with marginalization happens is "Othering—using stereotypes and representations about the other when meeting her/him and talking about her/him—is a common phenomenon in intercultural encounters in education." (Devin, 2016. p. 43) In the literature, Othering is usually spelled with a capital 'O' rather than a lower-case letter. Feelings of Othering are discussed in chapter four as experienced by the participants.

### **Lack of Understanding in Higher Education**

Another key issue of dealing with learning disabilities in higher education is that universities are responsible for providing support and guidance for students with all disabilities to help them acquire learning strategies and coping skills that enable them to reduce stress and be more successful (Heiman & Shemesh, 2012). By reducing stress, students are more likely to cope with their disabilities, which helps students be more successful in higher education. However, faculty and staff in higher education lack a basic understanding of how to accommodate and support students with learning disabilities (Shinn, & Ofiesh, 2012). Because not all faculty understand the importance of being sensitive to the needs of the students, some are

unwilling to provide extra time or other accommodations even when arrangements are made at the beginning of the semester (Stage & Milne, 1996). For example, Stage and Milne (1996) shared the story of a student:

I told the professor that I was dyslexic and she said, “Well, we can’t really do anything about that. You’re going to have to take the test just like everybody else.” I explained that I was asking for more time and she said, “Well, I don’t know if we can give you more time. (p. 434)

Therefore, experiences like those that are described above can be frustrating to students and do not help them to succeed in their coursework. In other research, university students with disabilities reported struggling with having too much assigned reading and writing, a lack of personal contact with professors including not enough clarification, and that the lectures often moved too quickly; thus, causing them to work harder than their peers for similar grades (Ryan, 2007). Many universities are attempting to ease this frustration by providing trainings for faculty and staff on how to support learners with disabilities in their classrooms; however, some faculty feel overwhelmed to add this to their already heavy workload (Ryan, 2007). Poor understanding of how students should cope with their disabilities and lack of support from faculty can keep students from being successful. Some universities have formal disability support services while others do not (Lalor & Madaus, 2013). Some universities do not have extensive support for students with learning disabilities because there is a lot of work and money needed meet the needs of the students (Oguntoyinbo, 2012).

Students with learning disabilities reported they were most successful in courses that had more visual (Brandenburg et al., 2015) and oral elements (Fahsl & McAndrews, 2012). They also feel that courses in the humanities in which more writing and reading were much more

difficult (Heiman & Precel, 2003). Students with disabilities who are successful in college tend to have an understanding of their weaknesses and strengths; using their strengths and persistence to set appropriate goals with their studies (Farmer, Allsopp, & Ferron, 2015). Students with disabilities who find success in college also advocate for themselves and seek out the assistance necessary to support their needs (Reed et al., 2009). This indicates that it is important and necessary for students to self-disclose their learning disability when they begin attending college. By doing so they are more likely to be provided the services they are eligible to receive. In addition to not reporting a disability, students at the universities often enroll in heavy academic loads and lack the structure in time and curriculum they have become accustomed to in their PK-12 educational experiences (Wolf, 2006) thus potentially causing themselves additional struggles.

With all of the confusion among the laws, differences between higher education and PK-12 education, lack of money, and the fact that students must self-disclose, it is no wonder that faculty and staff at universities lack understanding of the best way to serve students with learning disabilities. Each of these elements come into play while the students' identities are still developing.

### **Art, Healing, and Therapy**

The process of making art has been found to develop and enhance one's self (Van Lith, Fenner, & Schofield, 2011). Art therapy is a hybrid of the fields of art and psychology created to help people heal from various issues. According to the American Art Therapy Association (AATA) (2016),

Art therapy is an integrative mental health profession that combines knowledge and understanding of human development and psychological theories and techniques with

visual arts and the creative process to provide a unique approach for helping clients improve psychological health, cognitive abilities, and sensory-motor functions. Art therapists use art media, and often the verbal processing of produced imagery, to help people resolve conflicts and problems, develop interpersonal skills, manage behavior, reduce stress, increase self-esteem and self-awareness, and achieve insight. (p. 1)

The AATA continues, saying art therapy is used to communicate nonverbal information from the client by using art media and the creative processes. Art therapy is used to work with clients to gradually rebuild their true self and establish trust with themselves and objects in verbal and non-verbal ways (Willoughby-Booth & Pearce, 1998). The most popular form of art therapy in the research is photography, followed by theater, dance, poetry, and mural art mentioned less often in the literature (Boydell et al. 2012). In addition, Boydell et al. (2012) also found the ranges of health related issues arts-based strategies that are used varies from well-being to cancer, mental health to cognitive difficulties, as well as others. Not only are arts-based practices in place in many therapeutic situations, they are also being found as being effective. For example, Van Lith, Schofield, and Fenner (2013) assert that “arts-based practice show promise as a beneficial solution for mental health services because they are in line with the whole person recovery framework currently being adopted, and have high acceptability with consumers” (p. 1309). Helping with the mental health is a beneficial practice. To increase self-esteem and resilience universities can have art therapy to help them improve student mental health (Roghanchi, Mohamad, Mey, Momeni, & Golmohamadian, 2013).

Helping people to deal positively with their mental health and finding out about themselves can be powerful. Van Lith et al. (2013) also assert that their “review indicated that arts-based practices are of high benefit to psychological and social recovery particularly in the



areas of self-discovery, self-expression, relationships, and social identity” (p. 1309). Artists use art as a language, those that view the artwork are clued into the internal lives of the person that created the art (Wexler, 2012).

In addition to help with mental health issues, Beesley, White, Alston, Sweetapple, and Pollack (2011) found those that had suffered a stroke reported art as a creative outlet that increased their self-awareness and confidence. Thorley (2011) had a brain tumor removed while completing a Ph.D. program in adult learning. She used her passion and skills in the arts to write about what she calls ‘arts-based resistance learning’ (Thorley, 2011, p. 205). She shares that arts-based resistance learning helped her to improve her self-esteem and increase her sense of well-being as she healed from surgery (Thorley, 2011).

In addition to healing after surgeries, creating artwork is being used in other areas to help encourage wellness. Cameron, Crane, Ings, and Taylor (2013) state,

in terms of the arts, there was increasing acknowledgement that participation in creative activity, can – on an individual and communal basis – develop personal and social skills as well as technical or aesthetic knowledge. Thus a variety of social and institutional settings, including schools, prisons, and hospitals, artists are helping people to develop a range of positive behaviors, improving their ability to learn, to take responsibility, to act pro-socially, to take pleasure in creating things, and so on. (pp. 54-55)

Many organizations and institutions have found using arts to promote wellness and healing for a variety of individuals and groups.

Overall, creating artwork to promote healing is becoming more widespread. Creating art uses psychology and art and has been found to support self enhancement, confidence, healing,

and nonverbal communication. Not only does the process of creating art help others, it is also shared and viewed by those interested.

### **Art and Disability**

Bacon and Bennett (2012) published an article on how the lived experiences of those with dyslexia ended up studying art in higher education. They chose to research this field because other research has found there are particularly high numbers of students with dyslexia enrolled in art programs (Rankin, Riley, & Davis, 2007; Wolff & Lundberg, 2002). Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability. Bacon and Bennett (2012) found that some of their participants have always enjoyed creating their own art. Others in the study reported that because of their disability felt they did not have any other options within higher education outside of art (Bacon & Bennett, 2012). Some of these participants reported being encouraged by family members to pursue studying art because of their struggles in other academic areas. Another study found that people with dyslexia, a language-based learning disability, may have special skills in the area of drawing (McManus et al., 2010). However, because the number of participants in the group was not large, the authors suggest additional research be done about art students with disabilities. Wolff and Lundberg (2002) found the incidence of dyslexia among art students was 15 percent, while other majors the rate of incidence was <1.3 percent. Their hypothesis of the incidence of dyslexia among art students being higher than other majors was confirmed (Wolff & Lundberg, 2002). Wolff and Lundberg (2002) state the following:

...more simplistic interpretation of the relationship between creativity and dyslexia whether the early failure in school forces some dyslexic children to look for other fields in which they might find opportunities for compensatory success. Although this might be

true in some case, the extraordinary artistic talents of many dyslexics have been revealed even before they start to learn how to read and write. (p.42)

These researchers encouraged further interview research in the area of learning disabilities and art to better understand why or how students choose this major.

Freilich and Scechtman (2010) found that when students with disabilities received art therapy in addition to academic interventions they had more favorable outcomes in adjustment than children that only received the academic interventions. Positive changes were seen with as little as one weekly art therapy session.

### **Art in Education**

Students communicate about their lived experiences, vacations, relationships, memories, and perceptions with stories through their artwork (Dorff, 2012). Andrus (2012), who has done extensive work with a program that uses art with urban students with disabilities, states the following:

We have learned that through art experience, we can offer students a more positive identity from which they can experience a sense of power and competence. In Art Partners, we purposely offer students an alternative role as they learn to exercise their innate creativity and develop skills and insights that will serve them in all areas of life: that of *maker* and *consumer* of art. We have learned that art is an empowering, equalizing force that can offer children and teens a healthy way to feel capable and in control as they learn to respond to artworks, express opinions and make judgements about them, and manipulate media and materials to give expression to their inner visions and ideas. This is aesthetic expression that cannot be judged as right or wrong, and one that helps children see themselves as worthy, valuable and competent based on artistic achievement.

Children need experiences that can help them to see themselves for who they are, apart from the expectations and stereotypes that can easily influence their self-perceptions. (p. 32)

By teaching students the freedom of using art as a way to express themselves, there seems to be a link to the development of their identity. The process of art making is much more important and has greater value than the final artwork product (Deaver & McAuliffe, 2009).

Arts-based strategies are not only helpful in health-related areas of healing but they can be used effectively in the field of education in a similar manner. Eisner (2009), Professor Emeritus of Art and of Education at Stanford, wrote an article about what the field of education can learn from the arts. In this article, he outlines the following characteristics that can be important lessons for those in the educational field:

- a) Education can learn from the arts that form and content cannot be separated. How something is said or done shapes the content of experience.
- b) Education can learn from the arts that everything interacts; there is no content without form, and no form without content.
- c) Education can learn from the arts that nuance matters. To the extent to which teaching is an art, attention to nuance is critical.
- d) Education can learn from the arts that surprise is not to be seen as an intruder in the process of inquiry but as a part of the rewards on reaps when working artistically.
- e) Education can learn from the arts that slowing down perception is the most promising way to see what is actually there.

f) Education can learn from the arts that the limits of language are not the limits of cognition. We know more than we can tell.

g) Education can learn from the arts that somatic experience is one of the most important indicators that someone has gotten it right.

h) Education can learn from the arts that open-ended tasks permit the exercise of imagination is one of the most important of human aptitudes. It is imagination, not necessity, that is the mother of invention. (pp. 7-9)

He concludes the entire article with another powerful quote:

...to help students treat their work as a work of art is no small achievement. In the process, people become artists. Given this conception we can ask how much time should we devote to the arts in the schools? The answer is clear: all of it. (p. 8)

Clearly Eisner, an expert in both fields, feels strongly about the field of education should learn these key attributes from the field of art. These statements help me feel confident aligning this research at the intersection of art and education.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter discusses the history and current literature in the areas of identity development, Bildung, learning disabilities in higher education, art and disability, and arts use in healing and improvement. Each of these areas are key tenets of this dissertation to help clarify why it is necessary for research to be done in these overlapping areas. I have passion for each of these areas and want to find out as much as I can and reveal information to others about how each area relates to the others and brings my participants to their current points in life. Boydell et al. (2012) state the following,

We recognize that many factors are in common to both qualitative research and the arts-primarily, valuing the subjective nature of the human experience, an interpretive philosophy vis-à-vis knowledge production, including a creative process wherein experience is translated and transformed through this interpretive process and a representation of that experience is made available to others. (p. 2)

Art and qualitative research are two areas that bring together processes and representation to share the experiences, stories and emotions with others. The values of mental health recovery and qualitative research methods are compatible (Van Lith et al. 2012). Each of these statements encourage me to keep working with qualitative, arts-based research to help gain a better understanding of those with learning disabilities that choose to attend graduate art studio art programs and share my findings with others.

## **Chapter 3 - Methodology**

The purpose of this case study was to explore how people with a language-based learning disabilities, whom have completed an art and design MFA program at a university, discuss his/her coping mechanisms, career aspirations, and identity development as a result of being involved in the creative arts.

This study addressed three research questions:

1. In what ways do the participants describe their coping mechanisms (to mitigate their language-based learning disabilities) in relationship to their experiences in creative arts?
2. How did the participants arrive at their career aspirations as a result of negotiating their language-based learning disabilities in the creative arts?
3. What practices did the participants engage in that contributed to their identity development as art professionals with language-based learning disabilities?

### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is an effective way to start answering my questions and to help me begin to understand. Completing this research using qualitative inquiry is ideal, as it has permitted the problem to be studied flexibly using techniques sensitive to the participants' thoughts, emotions, and stories. Qualitative research allows the voice of the participant to be present while describing and interpreting the complex problem being studied (Creswell, 2013). Additional benefits of qualitative research include using the researcher as a key instrument for collecting data, using multiple methods of collecting information, such as interviews, documents, observations and/or images, rather than a single data source to describe, interpret, verify, and evaluate participant data (Peshkin, 1993). In other words, the researcher is able to use qualitative research to approach the world in a naturalistic manner and attempt to make sense of issues that

affect people and bring meaning to them thus providing a story that may make a call for change (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Creswell, 2013). Using a more naturalistic approach is beneficial because people are encouraged to tell their stories and share personal experiences. These personal experiences often yield dense, thick, and rich descriptions from participants while being flexible (Rolling, 2013).

Qualitative research often entails open-ended prompts and questions to allow for unforeseen possibilities and discovery as opposed to controlling variables as quantitative research prescribes (Holliday, 2012). Participants are able to provide rich and detailed answers to enlighten the researcher about their experiences. Analytical methods of research, such as quantitative methods, do not gather the emotional and descriptive impact from participants that qualitative inquiry practices can through telling stories (Bleakley, 2005). Description and emotion are key to the proposed research.

The basic tenets of qualitative research, as listed above, provided opportunities for the participants in this study to share their experiences by responding to open-ended prompts and questions from the researcher. This arrangement provided the participant the opportunity to express their understandings and knowledge in a manner that provided rich detail to the researcher. Additionally, data from multiple sources allowed for triangulation of information. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, participants also created a creative arts bag portrait, and shared their current artwork. By using qualitative research methods this information was analyzed and added valuable material to illustrate the story told by the participant about their experiences further.

For this research, the purpose was to understand the participant's experiences navigating the creative arts path with a language-based learning disability. It was important to gather



relevant information about the participant to achieve a better understanding of the participant's story (Bhattacharya, 2015). Qualitative research provides a way to better understand the participants.

### **Methodological Framework**

The trinity in which my research took place is at the intersection of narrative inquiry, arts-based research, and arts-based narrative inquiry. This trinity was necessary to appropriately collect arts-based data and to share it with the reader. Arts-based research methodologies allowed me to gather arts-based data from the participants and provided guidelines for me to analyze this information using arts-based techniques. This combination potentially uncovered stories that may not have otherwise been told thus enhancing the understanding of the experiences of the participant. Additionally, the use of narrative inquiry allowed me to share the story of the participants to the reader in a manner that is easily related to and comprehended.

### **Arts-based Research**

Using art-making and arts-based analysis during the research project is referred to as arts-based research (ABR). Arts-based research is often used in the field of education (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008). Arts-based educational research can help find out information to improve educational practices. Sullivan (2010) explain that

At its most basic, arts-based educational research is an example of practitioner-based inquiry whose aim is to bridge perceived disconnects between quantitative and qualitative traditions of research using the capacity of the arts to deal critically, socially, and creatively with problems facing education. (p. 56)

Arts-based research uses art and design in elements during the inquiry phase of data collection and when compiling the research text providing rich details throughout the process

(Barone & Eisner, 2012). Inquiry using the creative arts is used by researchers and artists across different fields to find deeper answers to their questions. For example, “artists, researchers, teachers engaged in a/r/tography are living lives of inquiry: Lives full of curiosity punctuated by questions searching for deeper understandings while interrogating assumptions” (Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005, p. 901) illustrates how this inquiry can be meaningful.

A/r/tography and arts-based research procedures allow researchers to gather and analyze information that challenges assumptions in manners other research methods may not allow. Such as when participants are asked to express their stories using a creative activity, they are given the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings in a manner beyond a verbal description. Participants may be asked to share their thoughts and feelings by using painting, writing, or other artistic approaches.

Artistic approaches can provide powerful elements to help communicate the story of the participant. Not only does the participant use the creative arts to express their story, but the arts-based researcher also is able to use creative arts to analyze and chronical information gathered. Leavy (2015) expounds on this by stating,

The arts simply provide researchers a broader palette of investigative and communication tools with which to garner and relay a range of social meanings. Moreover, the artist’s palette provides tools that can serve and expand the promise of traditional qualitative research. (p. 19)

As mentioned above, in addition to the participant creating an artistic work, the arts-based research process allows the researcher to be inspired and create a product representing the stories told by the participants. The process almost forces deeper analysis of data by the researcher. When the researcher serves as the artist, the researcher must think about the data in a deep and

meaningful way to begin to create an artist product that will represent the participant's story. It is much more complex than simply categorizing words and statements into piles. Simons and McCormack (2007) insist that, "starting with an image instead of a category allows the imagination to work at an unconscious level and brings to the surface a different form of understanding" (p. 295). This process takes time and can lead to additional insights that other types of research may not provide. Themes that may not have been as apparent when using more traditional coding methods become more apparent using arts-based methods to analyze data.

There are significant stories in each phase of the research process thus providing opportunities for creativity forcing us to think about research differently (Sclater, 2003). Arts-based research pioneers, Barone and Eisner, have outlined the research process in seven areas. The seven design elements of arts-based research: (1) The creation of a virtual reality, (2) The presence of ambiguity, (3) The use of expressive language, (4) The use of contextualized and vernacular language, (5) The promotion of empathy, (6) Personal signature of the researcher, and (7) The presence of aesthetic form (Barone & Eisner, 1997). Arts-based research processes cause the lines to blur between the traditional roles of researcher and artist. By incorporating these steps and accepting the blurriness of the roles, the researcher can use visual images (or other artistic practices) to create parallels between the stories of the participants and the reader to provide meaning (Quinn & Calkin, 2008). The greater meaning formed by these parallels can lead to information being shared with a larger audience than traditional qualitative research tends to be disseminated.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

Most people are familiar with stories and storytelling. Narrative inquiry takes storytelling to a bit more structured level. Narrative inquiry is a formal way to gather and tell stories about

the human experience. Two key narrative inquiry researchers, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) stated, “narrative inquiry comes out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Story... is a portal through which a person enters the world” (p. 477). Along with telling the stories of the human experience, the use of narrative inquiry provides a framework for writing and conveying the stories in an approach that the reader gains insight into the participant’s experience. Storytelling and writing are fundamental parts of life; narrative inquiry is a powerful tool to use to communicate these stories to others (Leavy, 2015). The research uses the power of narrative inquiry to communicate to the reader the educational experiences of the participants.

Narrative inquiry has two basic functions when used in educational research “experiencing the experience and thinking narratively” (Xu & Connelly, 2010, p. 355) that are used to share participant experiences. The basic tenets of narrative inquiry help to merge overall lived experiences of a participant with a specific and focused experience, thus providing greater information to the researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As stated above, people are all familiar with stories; however, stories should not be taken lightly. Stories should be cared for because across cultures and ages they have been used to express responsibilities, inspirations, obligations, and information to make meaning of the world we live in to others (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013). Stories are powerful and that power can be expressed in research to benefit and inform others.

One way to express powerful stories is through the narrative inquiry technique called Bildungsroman. Bildungsroman focuses on personal growth and identity development (Kim, 2016). Bildungsroman is a narrative inquiry that is based on the German term Bildung that is discussed more deeply in Chapter Two. Mortensen (2002) states that:

the concept of *Bildung* rests on assumptions that can advantageously be brought into play with contemporary development theories. This is above all true of *Bildung* conceived as an identity-shaping (individual) activity and of the underlying idea that *Bildung*- both as suparactivity and of the individual creation of culture and as personal development of identity- is inextricably bound up with man's reflective faculties and thus with self-examination and self-transcendence. (p. 441)

This method of narrative inquiry proved important to share the stories of growth and development of the participants. Questions asked during the semi-structured interviews will covered topics from early childhood to the present. Bildungsroman is about educating oneself with influences from society from early childhood until an advance age over the course of one's life (Schneider, 2012). The participants shared stories about their earliest memories of their educational experience to their present experiences in their graduate program in the creative arts. Bildungsroman provided a format for storytelling.

### **Arts-based Narrative Inquiry**

To better tell the story, this study combined the tenets of arts-based research and narrative inquiry by using the framework of arts-based narrative inquiry (ABNI). Arts-based narrative inquiry is a framework that is informed by arts-based approaches and narrative inquiry. In other words, narrative inquiry that frames the study includes some kind of creative aesthetic embedded within. This creative aesthetic could include, but is not limited to, visual arts, ethnodrama, creative non-fiction, documentary, etc. Kim (2016) provides a comprehensive explanation of how arts-based narrative inquiry could be used in qualitative research projects.

When using arts-based narrative inquiry the lines of arts-based research and narrative inquiry are blurred. The blurring of the genres of art and inquiry has been happening since the

early 1980s. This shift has allowed researchers to begin to understand humans and their social situations while looking at stories and symbols by taking on the role of a “scientific translator.” This exciting new role of scientific researcher allows for social issues consider emotions, stories, and art forms and put them together to share experiences (Kim, 2016).

Kim (2016) leans heavily on the pivotal work of Eisner and Barone’s (2012) arts-based research and Barone’s (2007) influential work with narrative inquiry to support the framework of arts-based narrative inquiry. With the strong foundation of narrative inquiry and arts-based research, it is logical to pair the two processes to provide a solid framework for creating arts-based narrative inquiry research to gather rich multilayered data.

The research used this pairing as framework of inquiry. Arts-based narrative inquiry is a technique used to help people to understand the results of qualitative research. As with most qualitative research, ABNI uses open-ended questions and prompts to gather information from participants. Additionally, ABNI research often encourages the participant to make a creative element to uncover additional information. Rolling (2013) explains the differences between arts-based researchers and other qualitative research,

Like qualitative researchers, arts-based researchers focus on questions rendering deeply wrought and richly described understandings of human perception, social behavior, and the common qualities of our shared experience. However, arts-based researchers emphasize reflexive, aesthetic practice-based, an improvisatory method for making meaning and recording knowledge. (p. 51)

Qualitative researchers aim to gather information to better understand humans and their shared experiences. Additionally, arts-based researchers use reflection and art to help understand the

experiences and stories of people in addition to interviews and prompts used by most qualitative researchers.

The goal of arts-based narrative inquiry is to illicit stories from the participants and convey them to the reader with deep meaning. In other words, arts-based narrative inquiry can be used to collect information that is written in a welcoming and easily understood manner to the reader. In addition to gathering the information using arts-based methods, data analysis can be completed using arts-based methods. Analysis of the data will be completed using arts-based research methods for this study. Kim (2016):

In arts-based narrative inquiry, the arts accompany narratives to convey the meaning of the stories told and retold. Hence, the ways of creating art are incorporated into the whole process of conducting narrative inquiry, including ways of thinking, collecting, analyzing, interpreting and producing a project. (p. 138)

Art is a powerful tool that can reveal information about the participant and the process of inquiry. Bochner and Ellis (2003) describe art as part of the process and a form of inquiry that can be evocative, emotional, a way of knowing, and a manner of speaking revealing the artist's, the researcher's and other's perceptions and feelings. The reader may better connect to the experiences of the participants because emotions, feelings, and perceptions are well explained through the process of ABNI.

### **Entry Point and Membership Role**

In this section, the details of gaining access to participants, participant selection, and the research sites will be discussed. First, the recruitment and selection of participants is described in as much detail as possible. Next the sites in which data collection, data analysis, art-making,

peer debriefing, and member checks took place are considered. The final topic discussed in this chapter is my membership role in the research activities.

### **Gaining Access and Participant Selection**

As mentioned, participants in this study are people with language-based learning disabilities who have graduated with a MFA in a studio art. This population was selected because of the developmental stage in their lives, their educational experiences, their disability, and their career aspirations.

I used purposeful sampling to locate participants. Purposeful sampling is used to gather information that tends to be more rich and deep than found by using random selection (Reybold, Lammert, & Stribling, 2013). In addition to using purposeful sampling, criterion-based sampling took place. Criterion-based sampling takes place when the researcher creates a list of requirements the participants must possess (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993). To meet the purpose of the study, it was necessary to select participants that have a language-based learning disability and to have graduated from a MFA program.

By using purposeful criterion referenced sampling, I selected potential participants from a larger pool of people whom meet the necessary criteria. I know many people who have earned MFA degrees. I talked to them to find potential participants that meet the outlined criteria. Once I was given names of potential participants, I contacted them and found out if they did indeed meet the criteria. If they met the criteria and were interested in possibly participating, they were given the informed consent to read. The potential participants documented their language-based learning disability by sharing documents such as a past Individual Education Plan (IEP) or other similar information. If they had a learning disability, they were given a chance to ask any questions and sign the consent if they wished to participate. When they agreed, we scheduled a



time and location of mutual agreement to begin working together. They were then asked the interview questions. The interviews were audio recorded. Once the participants finished, they were read the debriefing statement aloud and asked if they have any questions.

### **Research Site and Membership Role**

Interviews took place in a private agreed upon location, such as an office or another quiet public place. Member checks and data analysis also took place in my office or similar location. Art-making by the participant took place in a location that each participant deems appropriate, such as a studio. I offered them the use of my materials and office to complete the creative arts bag project. However, they both choose to complete it elsewhere, such as their own home or studio using any materials they choose. Each participant used the paper bag that was provided by me. They choose to use their own art supplies to complete the creative works.

When I created my art during the data analysis stage of the research, I used my office. In my office, I have the appropriate lights, materials, easels, and space for the art-making to happen. Peer debriefing was completed during a convenient time for myself and my peer in a location that was agreed upon. Peer debriefing is often used in qualitative research to ensure that another qualitative research agrees with the coding process and labels (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Zoom, a video conferencing platform, was often used as a modality to meet and collaborate with participants and peer reviewers.

### **Data Collection Methods**

In this section, information about the types of data that was collected, a data inventory table and reference to an extended timeline was included. Details of the in-depth semi-structured and the elicited interviews are discussed. Additionally, there is detailed information about and instructions for completing the creative arts bag project within this section of the chapter.

This case study was conducted utilizing qualitative arts-based research in education to gather an in-depth understanding of the views of the participants and use art as a form of inquiry, analysis, and a context through which the participants negotiate their experience of learning disability in education and identity development. This study included interviews, completion of a creative arts bag portrait, and documents such as pictures of the participant's current artwork. Data inventory in Table 1 is a recording of the pages that were generated as raw data during the study. The timeline is included and contains all information I collected during this study. The timeline and page production follows below.

**Table 3.1 Data Inventory**

Source of data	Number of pages	Number of pages total
2 - one-hour initial interviews	20 pages per one hour of transcription	$20 \times 2 = 40$ pages
2 - Creative Bag Portrait	10 pages per one hour of review	$10 \times 2 = 20$ pages
Current Artwork review	10 pages per one hour of review	$10 \times 2 = 20$ pages
2- 30 minute follow up interviews	20 pages per one hour of transcription	$20 \times 2 = 40$ pages
Journal reflections	3 pages per week 15-week semester	$3 \times 15 = 45$ 45 pages
3 - 30 minute peer debriefing sessions	20 pages per one hour of transcription	$10 \times 3 = 30$ pages
4 – 30 minute member checks	20 pages per one hour of transcription	$10 \times 4 = 40$ pages
Total Pages		230 pages

*Table 3.1.* Data was collected using arts-based research methods as outlined by Leavy (2015) and Bhattacharya (2016). Data collection took place during the winter of 2016 and early 2017.

## Interviews

It is appropriate to use qualitative research to gather an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences (Merriam, 1998). To gain this information, qualitative researchers use

interview questions, follow-up questions, through long and focused conversations to construct as complete of a picture as possible of their participants' experiences (deMarrais, 2004). In-depth semi-structured interviews consist of general questions allowing flexibility while providing a guide to help maintain focus during the interview process (Kim, 2016).

Saldaña (2011) states interviewing as a

data collection method is an effective way of soliciting and documenting, in their own words, an individual's or group's perspectives, feelings, opinions, values, attitudes, and beliefs about their personal experiences and social world, in addition to factual information about their lives. (p.32)

The interview information that is described above by Saldaña creates a story containing portions of the participant's history. Oral history interviews are popular interview formats in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). By using in-depth semi-structured interviews in qualitative research to gather information, I was able to analyze, code, and write narratives about the experiences and histories of the participants.

I used semi-structured open-ended qualitative interview questions to provide insight about the participants' experiences during their education. By interviewing graduates of an MFA program, the stories were shared to gather a better understanding of how they negotiated education with a learning disability to reach a career in the creative arts.

After an initial meeting to begin establishing rapport, I met with the participants three more times each for interviews. The interviews were audio recorded so that the data could be transcribed. Following are examples of the interview prompts that were asked/stated:

- Tell me about your day.
- Tell me about the creative activities that you are passionate about.

- Walk me through your education from as far back as you can remember.
- Tell me how your learning disability has affected your education.
- Tell me about a time when you were engaged in creative arts and you had to also deal with your learning disability.
- Tell me how your learning disability typically affects your life.
- Walk me through your process of deciding to pursue a career in the creative arts.
- Tell me about the first time you realized you wanted a career in creative arts in as much detail as you can.
- Talk to me about the time you did this artwork.
- What are your career aspirations throughout your life?
- Tell me about a time when you thought about your learning disability in terms of a career selection.
- Tell me about a time when you thought about your learning disability in terms of being a creative artist.
- Tell me about the last time when you thought about your learning disability in terms of being a creative artist.

I did not ask all the questions in the first interview. I drafted questions for the second interview based on responses from the first interview and the creative arts bag portrait. These questions were created using Spradley's (1979) descriptive questions interviewing guidelines. Some of the questions are considered to be "grand tour" questions. According to Spradley (1979), grand tour questions describe how things usually are. For example, the prompt "tell me how your learning disability typically affects your life" is a grand tour question. The next type of question Spradley (1979) outlines is a "specific grand tour" question. This type of question or

prompt takes a recent experience related to the topic. An example of a “specific grand tour” prompt in this research is “tell me about the last time when you thought about your learning disability in terms of being a creative artist.”

### **Elicited Interviews**

In addition to in-depth semi-structured interviews, another important manner in which data was collected for this research was elicited interviews. Hearing the story about the relationship between an object and a human can inform researchers how people connect with objects, people, places, and materials (Brown, Clarke, & Frederick, 2015). Brown et al. (2015) continue by sharing that people may have an immediate sensation or a slow burning attachment to objects that become important to them. In this study, objects were, but not limited to artwork, objects, creative arts bag portraits, and photographs. These items were used to share or remind people of stories and experiences. Two key elements that describe the role that objects may play in our lives are “objects as companions to our emotional lives and objects as provocations for thought” (Turkle, 2007 p.5). Participants chose items of importance to them and their experiences to share with me during the process of elicited interviews. The sharing of these objects elicited stories of experiences, emotions, or feelings that might not have otherwise been shared by only interacting during a more traditional semi-structured interview format.

### **Creative Arts Bag Project**

By combining the information gathered from in-depth semi-structured interviews with elicited interviews and art-making, a robust representation of the participant developed. I chose to do so because I feel that art-making is the next logical step when working with participants who are working to become professional artists. “Art-making provides a window, revealing the multiple states of consciousness that arise from experiences, desires, and imagination of

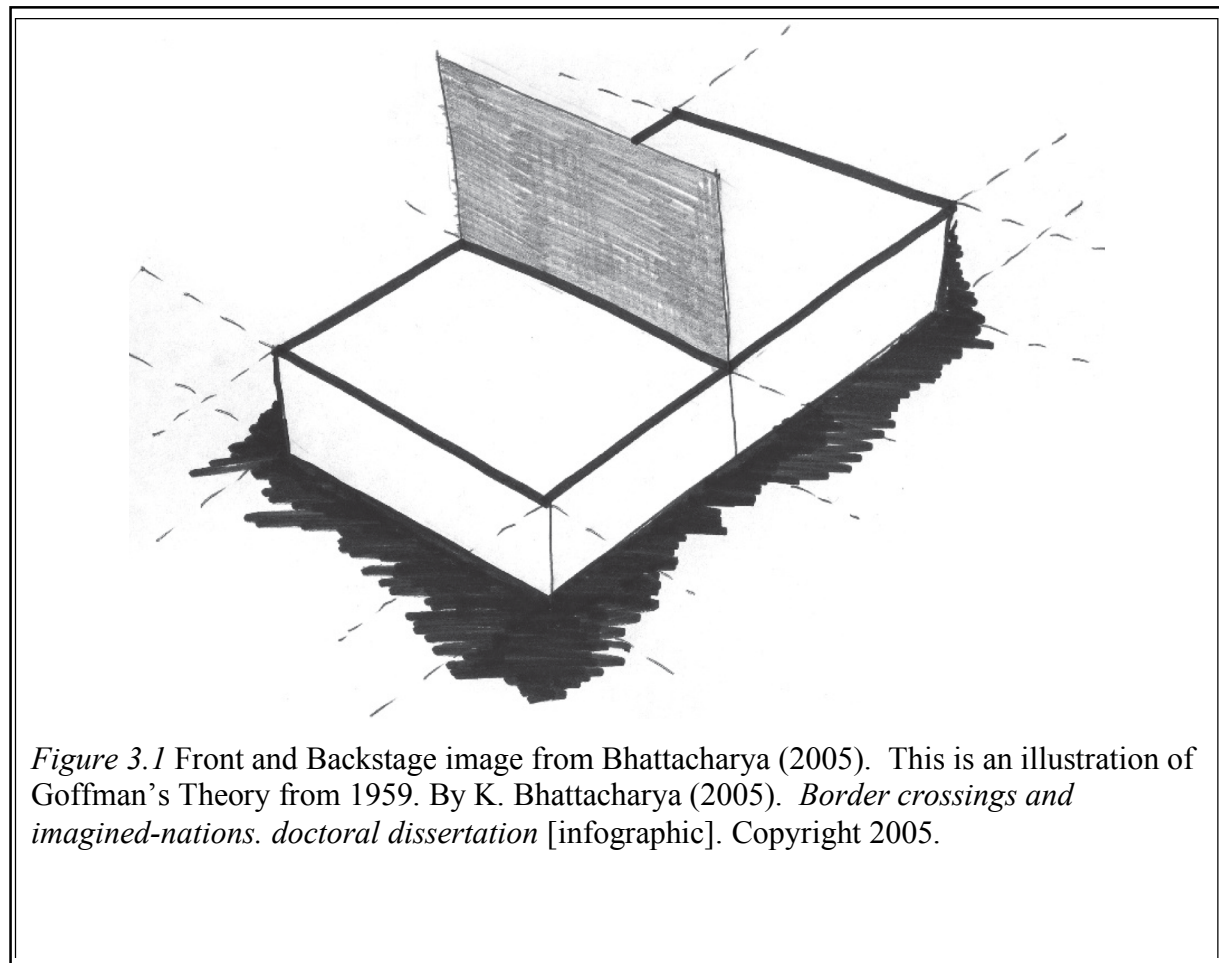
possibilities” (Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016 p. 15). Art seems to be a logical way for artists to share their experiences. This proved to be true during this study also.

The art-making in this research was done when the participant completed the creative arts bag portrait. The participants were asked to use images and objects to depict their front and backstage selves on a paper grocery bag. Detailed instructions follow in this section.

The term ‘frontstage’ is part of a theory used by Goffman to describe the favorable impressions or public impressions that people try to create using their actions, clothing, and skills (Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1959) continues by describing a person’s ‘backstage’ as the private parts of a person’s life, things that many keep to themselves. The participant had freedom to express themselves as they best see fit with few, if any, restrictions. Bhattacharya (2009) states,

All scenes were marked with time and relations to another scene that served either as a front- or backstage for the current scene. Armed with a compatibility with performance ethnography I began to examine the front- and backstage figuration closely. These front- and backstages could become the spaces where the participants experience certain events, topics, and epiphanies. Sometimes these spaces were physical (i.e., a classroom) and sometimes they were imagined (i.e., memories of India) or temporal. Realizing that the front- and backstages have separate audiences and that each audience is privy to different kinds of performances, I began to develop the idea of front- and backstage further, concluding that front- and backstages are relational terms and are not fixed in their performative spaces. This means that what is backstage for one audience could be front stage for another audience who is observing performances at the backstage. (pp.141-142)

**Figure 3.1 Front and Backstage**



*Figure 3.1 Front and Backstage image from Bhattacharya (2005). This is an illustration of Goffman's Theory from 1959. By K. Bhattacharya (2005). *Border crossings and imagined-nations. doctoral dissertation* [infographic]. Copyright 2005.*

Participants shared the story behind their creative arts bag portrait. They provided additional explanation of their front and backstage of their bags so that I have a deeper understanding of the bag, the story, and of my participant. “Images can be used to communicate more holistically, incorporating multiple layers, and an evolving stories or questions” (Weber, 2008) while helping us to pay attention to things in a new way. The images shared something that was not expressed in interviews alone.

Others have discovered the power of using images. Scholars and practitioners in other fields, such as art therapy, health, and counseling use art-based practices to help their clients. Van Lith, Schofield, and Fenner (2013) did a critical review of 23 previous articles related to art-



based practices and helping those in need of mental health recovery. The results found that arts-based practices contributed to multiple areas of recovery. The areas found to have the most implications for rehabilitation are as follows: a) clinical recovery, b) psychological recovery, c) social recovery, d) occupational recovery, and e) contextual recovery. A client with a disability receiving mental health services with arts-based practices shared “through the pictures and words, and having someone to listen to make sense of it all, I am not ashamed any more” (Learnmonth & Gibson, 2010 p. 63). The use of arts-based practices and research are shifting understandings of creating and sharing new knowledge (Boydell, et al., 2012). Using knowledge obtained through the ABNI process is often shared with larger audiences of people than small academic circles.

I have found new ways to express myself using arts-based practices. Personally, I have created my own creative arts bag portrait. I was required to do so as part of a qualitative research class during my doctoral studies. Each student in the class was given a paper grocery bag to take home to construct our bag portrait. We were encouraged to be creative in expressing ourselves. We followed similar instructions to the instructions for this research. We were to decorate the front of the paper bag to show our “frontstage.” On the back of the bag, we were to portray the sides of us that we prefer to keep hidden from the world or our “backstage.” It took me some time to consider what I wanted to share with others, however, after some contemplation I was able to create a bag that I felt reflected myself and personality fairly well. I used pictures, words, and Wordles characterizing my privileges. Paper, glue, and markers were all used to enhance the bag. I colored in a more orderly and pretty manner on the front of the bag portraying the side of myself that I want the world to see. However, on the back of the bag, the lines were chaotic, random, and all over much more random than on the front. These lines and colors, in addition to



the bags with our partners and we each designed interviews for each other based on the bags. My partner asked me questions that I would never have thought of after reviewing and using the bag portrait as a prompt for interview questions. For example, she asked about my past educational experiences. Once the interview series was completed each partner wrote a paper and completed a short presentation about their subject. I was shocked to hear my partner present information about me. She had shared information in verbal, written, and painted formats. She had gathered information about me, my life, my insecurities, and my strengths that I had no idea that I had consciously provided her the information. She was able to identify so much deep information by using the bag as a prompt and data resource. It was incredibly eye opening to see the raw and personal information she gleaned from the creative arts bag project.

In addition to the experience described above, the instructor of the course decided to complete the scholarship of teaching and learning based on this project. Once class ended, the professor interviewed me about my bag and the duo ethnographic project together. She used arts-based data analysis to help her to create themes and a painting. Again, I was shocked and amazed to see the written and painted stories that she created from the interview and the bag portrait. The professor had discovered information that I did not consciously reveal during the interview. The written narrative, poem, and paintings were so touching and “me” that I still cry when I read them. I will cherish the words and paintings that so accurately captured that portion of my life and story. I will also display the image and poetry once it has been given to me proudly. I cherish the words and painting as something personal and meaningful.

Because this was such a personal and meaningful experience, I want to explore it more. These experiences strongly drew me to using arts-based research and more specifically the creative arts bag portrait to find out more about the participants. In the spring of 2016, I

completed a pilot study for this research using the creative arts bag portrait to help me find deeper insight into my participants. This helped me to create interview questions for the following interviews as well as increase my knowledge about my participant. Additionally, I learned that even a professional artist and art student obtaining a master's degree needed a bit of friendly encouragement to complete the bag portrait about himself. This information and feedback helped me to frame and describe the expectations for future research participants.

For this research, the participants were given a paper bag to create their creative arts bag portrait. As mentioned, to avoid any cost to the participants I provided some art supplies for them to borrow, if they choose. However, the participants chose to use the paper bag I provided and their own art supplies. Participants were given at least a week to complete the project. Participants were given a paper bag on which they were to create a portrait of themselves. They were encouraged to think about their educational journey through PK-12 and higher education. On one side of the bag was a reflection of the person that they project to the world. On the other side was a reflection of the person that they perhaps keep hidden from the world. In addition to creating the bag, the participant shared their existing artwork they found relevant that connects them to their experiences of navigating their path of having a learning disability, inspired them to do what they do, and their experiences as a creative artist. To align with the purpose of this project, participants were asked to share responses to the following questions:

- What are your educational experiences in relationship to learning disabilities?
- How do you connect your values, beliefs, and identity development about learning disabilities to your artwork?
- What kinds of outcomes you expect from your artwork in relationship to your learning disability? (Bhattacharya, 2015a)

- How does the artwork on the front of the bag demonstrate who you are in relationship to your learning disability, school experiences publically?
- How does the artwork on the back of the bag demonstrate who you are in relationship to your learning disability, school experiences privately?

I gave the questions to the participants orally and in written format, if they requested.

Once the creative arts bag portrait was completed, the participant and I met to discuss the bag. The participants were encouraged to share about themselves and the bag. As in my pilot study, the bag prompted me to ask questions that I likely would have not thought of without this visual and object elicitation. I organized the information from the creative arts bag portrait with other interview information as outlined below.

### **Data Management and Analysis**

Data management involves the steps in which I took to manage all of the data that I collected. In order to manage all of my data, I kept the data saved by date and stored electronically in files. In order to store my information in an organized manner, I titled the files with a name and date. In addition to storing my data, I transcribed and analyzed my data in a timely manner once it had been collected. Journals and field notes that I took during the data collection process were also be completed. Once all of this data was combined and organized, I began coding and putting information into categories and themes.

I encouraged myself to work through the data transcription, coding, and analyzing by scheduling time to write daily in my calendar. I also blocked off the time and honored it as if it were an appointment with myself. Additionally, I challenged the entire college of education to join a writing accountability group twice a week. This challenge held me accountable. I

honored the research and writing time for the entire semester despite rarely being joined by colleagues.

## **Data Analysis**

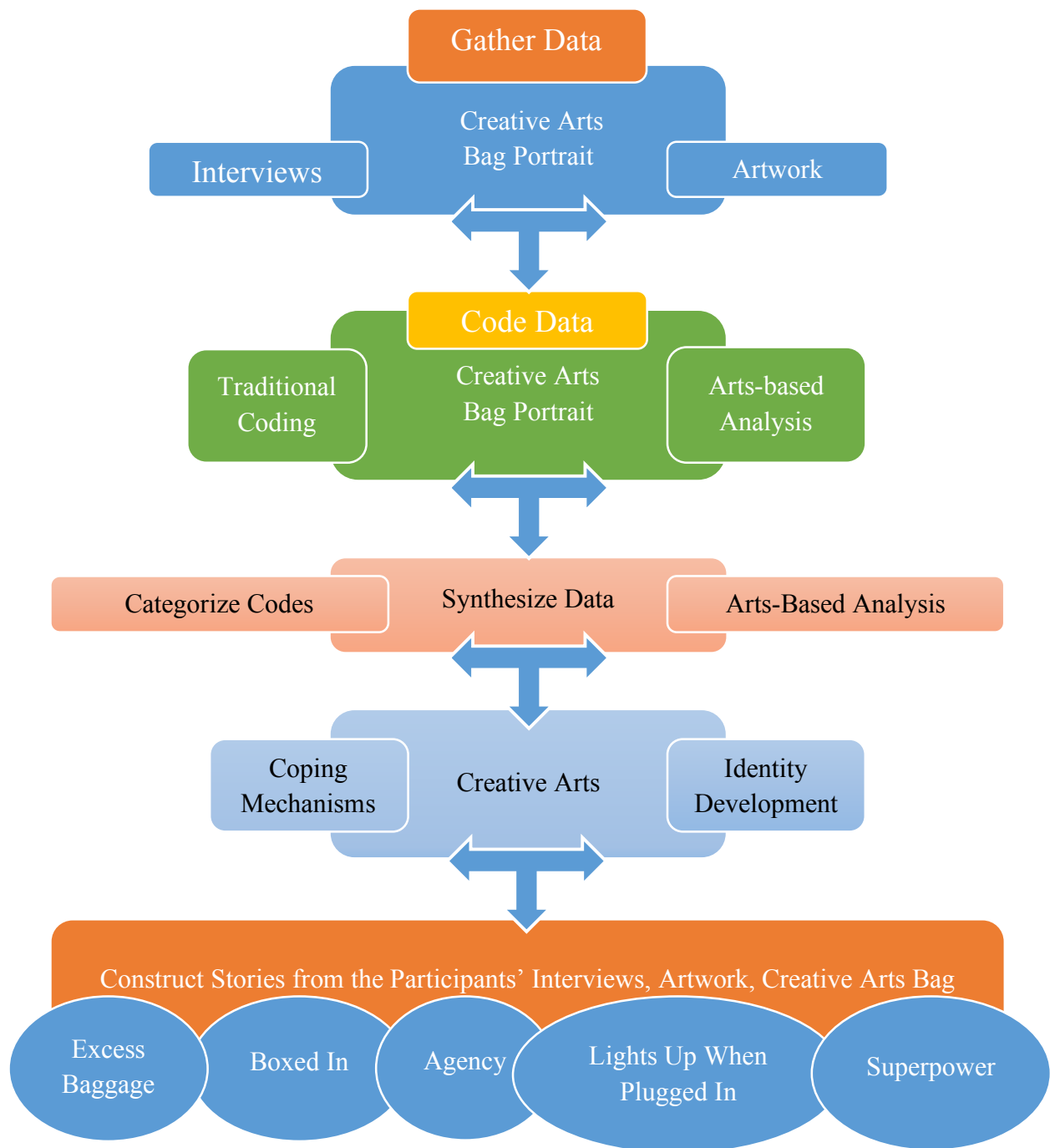
Qualitative research is an emergent process and therefore it was difficult to predict in advance what might emerge that would trigger the necessary and aligned data analysis methods. However, now that the process is complete, here are the paths that I followed during this study to analyze data. Each of the following were addressed: a) arts-based narrative inquiry, b) analysis of art, art-making, meaning making from art, and the ways in which the participants made sense of their stories, c) specifically how the art will be analyzed (systematically) and d) narrative analysis.

After I completed data collection, I took the transcribed interviews and coded the data using narrative coding techniques (Saldaña, 2016). According to Saldaña (2016), “narrative coding is appropriate for intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions to understand the human condition through story” and can be used with arts-based research and with case studies (p. 154). Narrative analysis uses the following elements and schemes for coding: story type, form, genre, tone, purpose, setting, time, plot, storyline, point of view, character type, characterization, theme, literary elements, spoken features, and conversation interactions (Saldaña, 2016). Detailed examples are included in the next section of the chapter.

Additionally, I used arts-based data analysis (Bhattacharya, 2016) (described below) to further uncover themes from the stories and information that may not be apparent in the more traditional coding process. I created an arts-based mixed media representation to embody the participants’ stories. This was completed for the pilot study and I followed a similar plan for the dissertation study. Once the narrative coding and the mixed media work were completed, I used

narratives to further explain and tell the stories of the participants. The table below is a visual representation of the data gathering process.

**Table 3.2 Data Management**



*Table 3.2.* This table is a visual representation of the process of managing data that was completed throughout this study. Infographic by B.L. Crawford & N. Day, (2017). *Data Management* [Infographic]. Copyright 2017.



## Detailed Account of Traditional Analysis Process

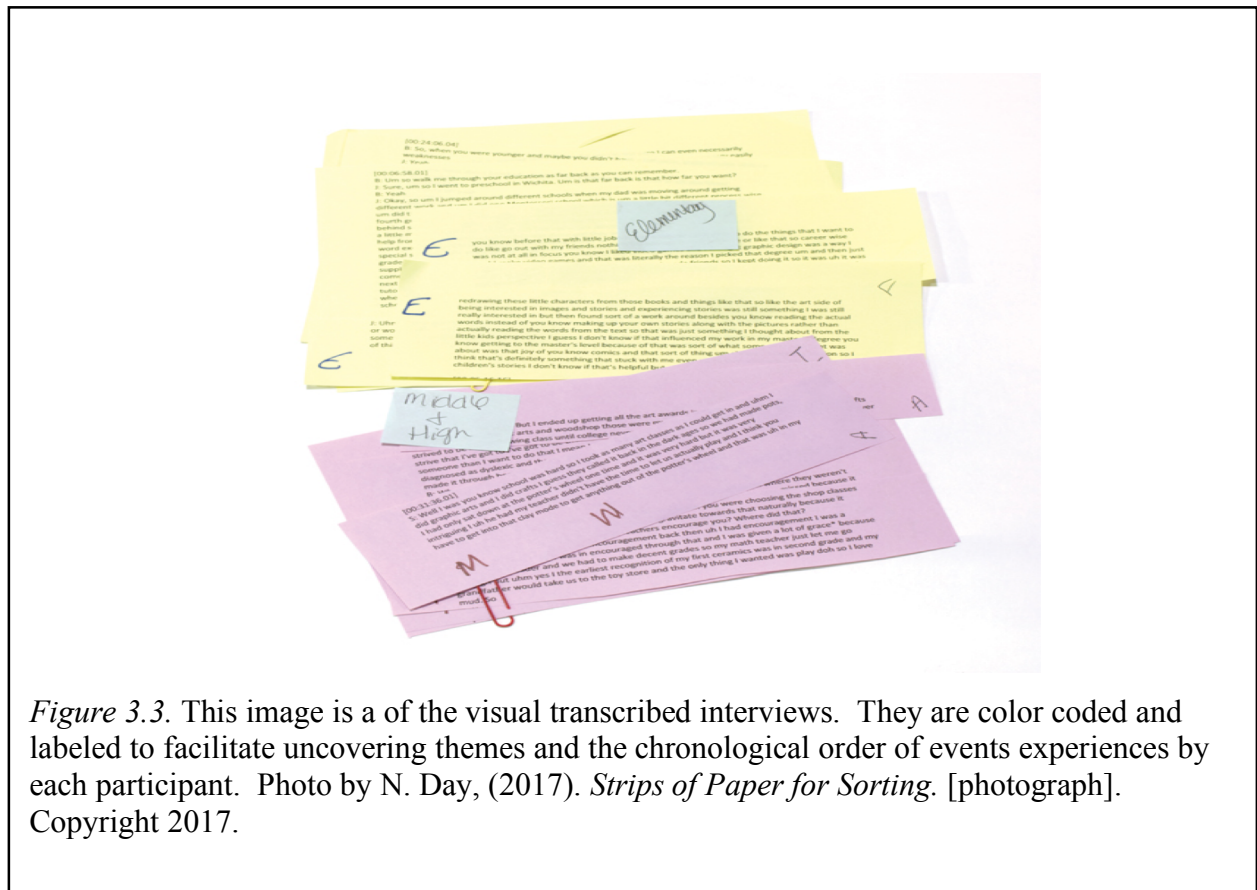
Once the interviews were transcribed, I shared the transcripts with the participants to check for mistakes or misunderstandings. Each participant saw nothing that needed to be changed with the transcripts or other information they shared with me. I printed out the transcripts on colored sheets of paper. Josephine and Declan were the pseudonyms that were chosen for the participants. Yellow paper was used for Declan's transcripts and purple was used for Josephine's transcripts. I color coded the transcripts to be able to separate whose interview was whose while I was coding, comparing, and contrasting themes. Once I completed this quality check, I read each participant's interviews from beginning to end to remind myself of what was said in its entirety. I read each of the transcripts as if they were a book or play individually. Once I completed this reading I cut the pieces of paper to aid in sorting the information. For this step, I sorted the information chronologically to begin to build the bildungsroman story. I determined the best way for me to divide the stacks of information was by sorting elementary school, junior/middle and high school, undergraduate, graduate, and life. This helped me to begin to develop a timeline of each participant's life experiences of negotiating their path through educational settings.

Once I had sorted and labeled each of the pieces of the deconstructed transcript, then looked for themes, important statements, categories, and other information to construct cross case comparisons. Themes emerged from the narratives as I worked with the strips of paper. For example, the theme of *boxed in* became apparent as I worked with the information shared by the participants. I was able to discern that both Josephine and Declan had isolated themselves to get their work done and to avoid others knowing about their learning disability. They *boxed* themselves in to be productive as well as a measure of self-preservation. This developed into

one of the five themes emerging from the data. The themes were used to organize the story of each of each participant separately. Then the themes were used to create the cross-case comparison combining their narratives in chapter four.

The traditional coding of this data fed directly into the arts-based analysis of the data. The arts-based analysis is described in the next section.

**Figure 3.3 Stripes of Paper for Sorting**



*Figure 3.3.* This image is a of the visual transcribed interviews. They are color coded and labeled to facilitate uncovering themes and the chronological order of events experiences by each participant. Photo by N. Day, (2017). *Strips of Paper for Sorting*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

## Detailed Account of Arts-Based Data Analysis Process

I used the following information to analyze my data. Following this process helped me to find emerging themes and information that ended up being highlighted in the narratives of the participants. This detailed account is a solid guide for completing an arts-based analysis of

participant data. The only modification from these instructions was that I did some of the steps as a draft on paper before I put the intended images and words on the canvas. I was cautious to avoid messing up the final creative work. I am still working to develop and trust my own artistic abilities. The following instructions were used (Bhattacharya, 2015):

1. Read the transcript closely. Connect to the transcript, not for identifying codes, categories, or themes, but to become deeply empathic about what the participant states in the conversation. Feel the words in your mouth; read them slowly as you become aware of how your body and mind are reacting to these words.
2. Select passages from the transcript that stand out after a close reading.
3. Draw visual icons, in any form that you like, on the passages that stand out to you. These icons do not have to be high in aesthetic quality but they have to connect your thoughts, emotions, and insights to the selected passage.
4. Cut out your selected portions of transcripts and glue them on the canvas in any orientation you like
5. Turn your canvas around in another orientation so you can have a different perspective.
6. Use any form of art and mark-making instruments to connect the excerpts of transcripts you have on the canvas.
7. Turn your canvas around in another orientation so you can have a different perspective.
8. On a separate piece of paper write about the experiences, emotions, and thoughts that arise for you in response to seeing your symbols and your connections.
9. Create at least three to four circular spirals on your canvas
10. Now read your writing. Select words or phrases that stand out to you and either write them in your spirals or cut and paste those words into your spirals.

11. Use the viewfinder--the cardstock paper with a hole in the middle (see Figure 1)--to view your canvas. Pause at the spots that draw you in and reflect on why you are drawn to those spots.
12. When you feel that you are intensely drawn to a spot, frame the specific spot by drawing some kind of boundary around the region to highlight this “hot spot.”
13. The space within your hot spot region is the positive space and the space outside is your negative space.
14. Look at the space outside your hot spots and consider the nature of the space, and what is going on with that space. Based on your understandings, reconciliations, and negotiations of the narratives in your outside space, decide how you should cover up the space—either translucently or with opaque colors.
15. If you are inspired to do so, feel free to make connections between the hot spots on your canvas; alternatively, you can leave it as is (see Figure 2).
16. Look at your artwork on the canvas and free write in response to the following prompt:  
  
The narratives that arise for me in this artwork in this moment are . . .
17. Reflect on the following questions – 15 minutes
  - What did you discover/understand/sharpen/deepen/better through this activity?
  - How did covering, uncovering, writing, and drawing allow you to gain insight into how you work with qualitative data?
  - How might this activity change or inform the way you think about conducting your qualitative research?
  - What insights about yourself did you discover as you worked with the narratives the participant shared with you?

## **Arts-based**

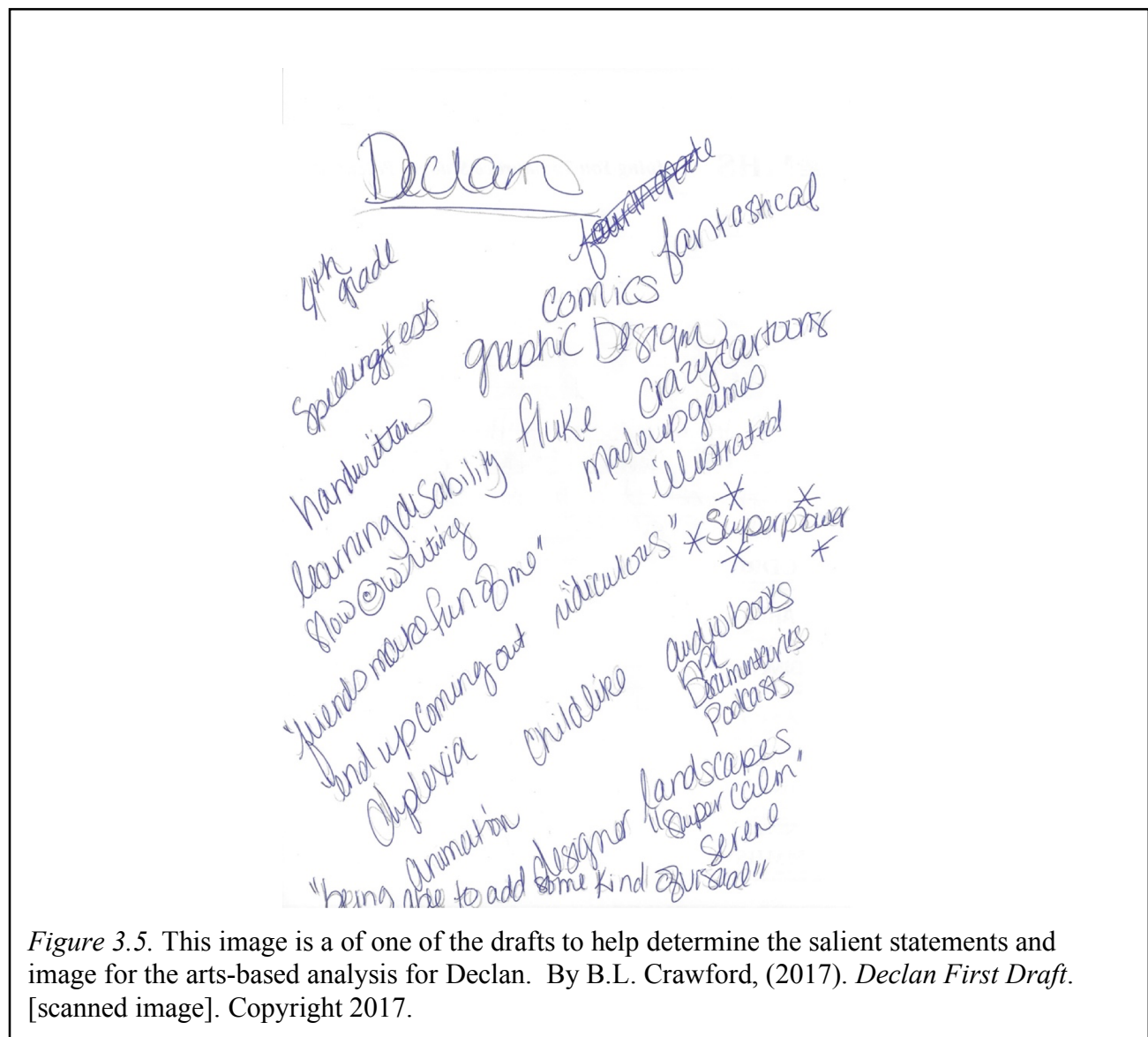
For the arts-based analysis, I use Bhattacharya's (2016) steps as a guide for completing the analysis. I have provided multiple images to provide a guide of the steps I took throughout the process. Once I finished reading Josephine's transcript entirely, I read it again to start pulling out statements I found to be influential, important, and noteworthy. I wrote them down, as demonstrated in the image below. I did this same process for Declan's transcripts.

A handwritten draft on lined paper, titled "Josephine" in a large, cursive script. The text is organized into several sections, some enclosed in circles or boxes. The sections include:

- Top Section:** "Find quote about wanting to play with clay" and "Find quote about the process".
- Left Column:** "I sold my self", "I get my hands on clay", "I'm all about the process", "I had to work for it", "protecting what is precious on the inside", "I love education, I love learning", "Education whoa", "My work is a lot about isolation", "long next appropriate desire to young beyond the", "I'm a maker", "Cathartic", "Isolation".
- Right Column:** "Propeller", "Headspin", "Vertigo", "Dyslexia", "hangers", "Studio", "Upside down", "labels", "boxes x", "2 masters", "Visual", "1975 college", "Art teacher".
- Bottom Section:** "Cry Critiques".

The handwriting is in blue ink, and the paper has horizontal lines. The overall style is a rough, personal draft.

**Figure 3.5 Declan First Draft**

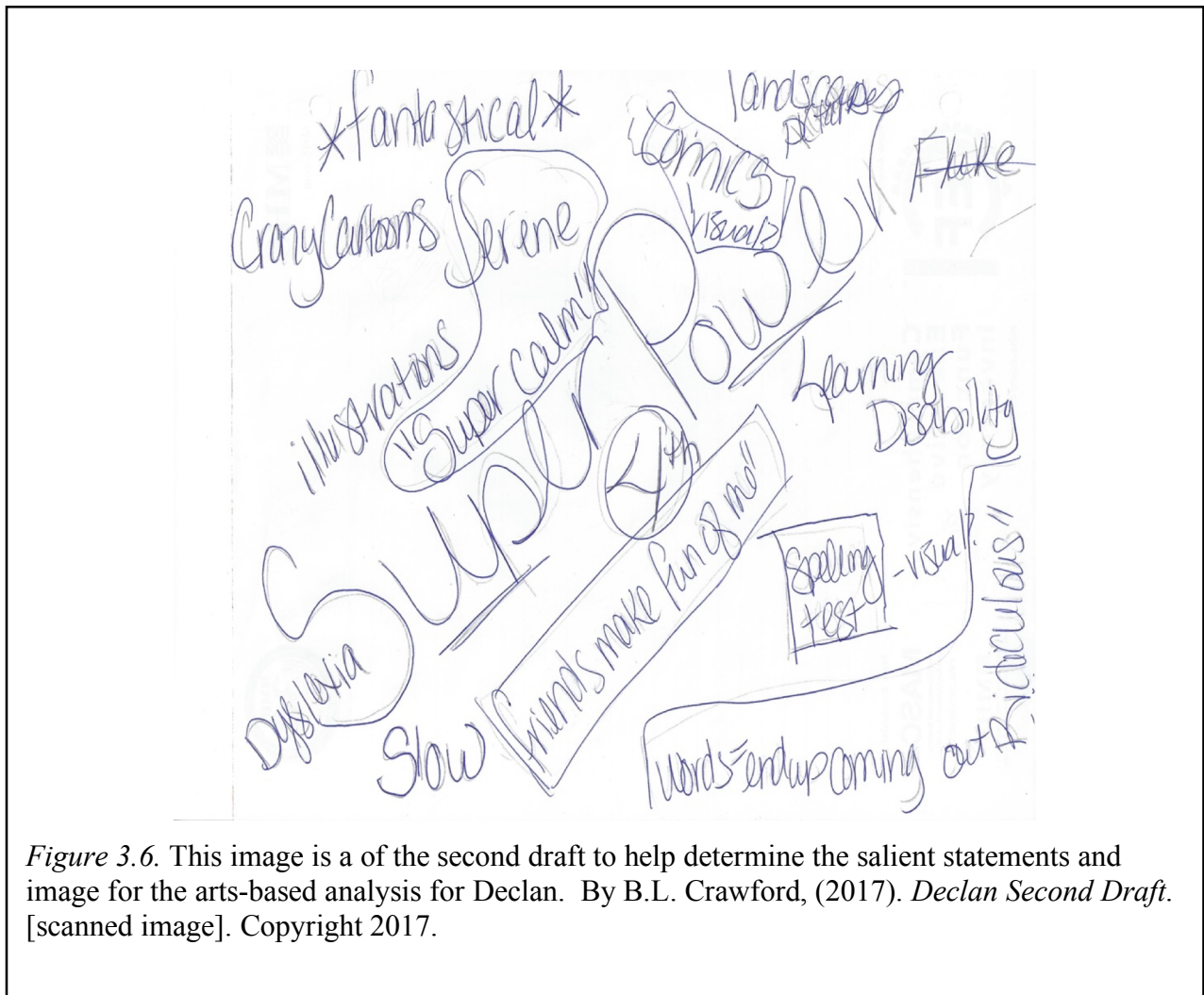


*Figure 3.5. This image is a of one of the drafts to help determine the salient statements and image for the arts-based analysis for Declan. By B.L. Crawford, (2017). Declan First Draft. [scanned image]. Copyright 2017.*

Once I studied these quotes and words, I worked on another draft to find the more salient ideas, issues, and incidents to share. For example, during this process I began to notice the word “superpower.” This term keeps surfacing as something that needs to be of focus. By the end of this process *superpower* became one of the themes discussed at length in Chapter 4. Once I finished the first draft, I created a second draft of this process. As you see below, I started planning which quotes to include, if the representations should be images, found objects,

or words.

**Figure 3.6 Second Draft of artwork for Declan**



Once this draft was complete, I started getting the images, found objects, and other art supplies ready to begin working. I let this process happen organically, I find it best to get out all of the supplies available to determine what will work best to express the visually as I think is best. For example, I did not want to limit myself to only paint or markers. I wanted to have many options. I ended up choosing to use markers, pencils, ink, multiple types of glue, poking



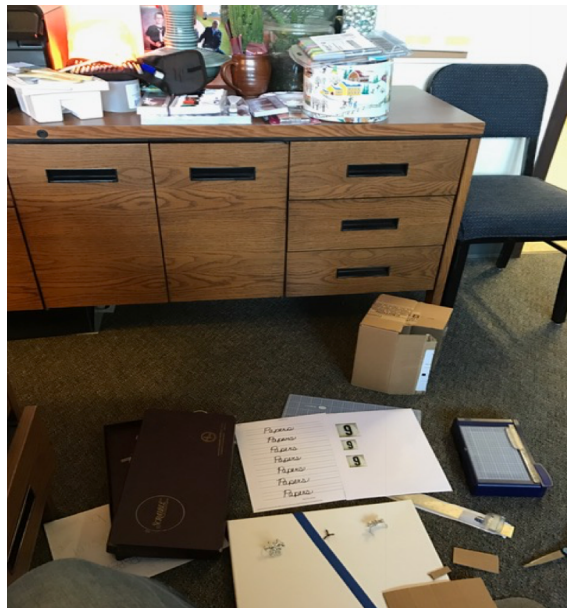
holes in the canvas, ribbon, photo paper, and cardboard. In addition to these more typical art supplies, I wanted to include found objects to add texture to the pieces.

### Figure 3.7 Preparing Objects



*Figure 3.7.* To work on the arts-based analysis, I decided which items I wanted to focus on and printed them on photo paper to ensure that the ink or paint would not entirely cover all of the words or images. I also had to cut the pieces to size. By B.L. Crawford, (2017). *Preparing Objects*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

**Figure 3.8 All of the Art Supplies**



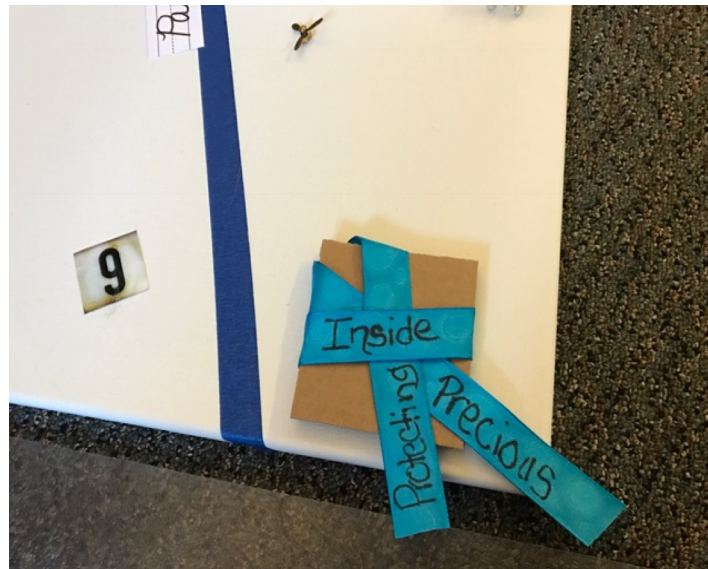
*Figure 3.8.* While preparing to complete the arts-based analysis, I got out all of my art supplies. Ink, paint, makers, brushes, rulers, cutters, and canvases to make sure I had everything that I would need to create the mixed media piece of artwork. By B.L. Crawford, (2017). *All of the Art Supplies*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

I ended up using the found objects in each final product. I went shopping at a local second hand store scouring the shelves and cabinets for items that seemed to add to the depth and add to the description of each participant. I did not know what I was looking for when I started, however, once I found the objects I knew I wanted incorporate them in my work. The objects that ended up being used in the pieces were rings, photos of landscapes, a propeller (provided by the participant), and comic stickers.

I began by following the draft of the quotes, words, and images I wanted to include on for each person. I determined which images that I wanted to draw, write, or put on photo paper to create a difference in the impact that each of the areas of the artwork. For example, I knew the ink would not soak into the photo paper as it would copy paper or canvas. Images or words that

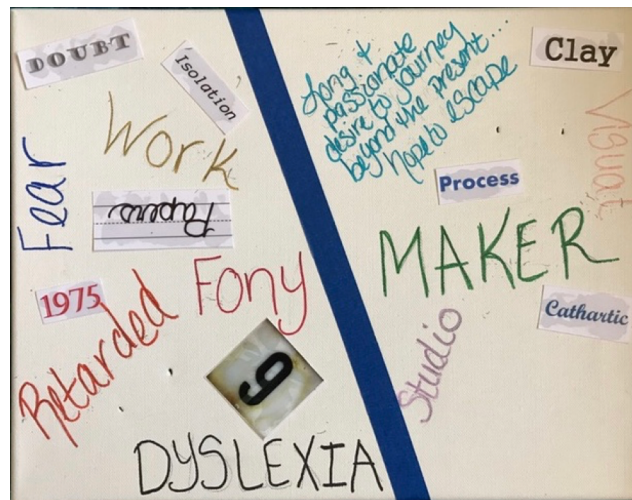
I wanted to make more clearly observable to the reader, I put on photo paper before applying them to the canvas. Other words, images, or entire quotes I felt would be best represented with handwriting. You can see below some of the steps of creating the work for Josephine's artwork. A similar process was completed to create Declan's artwork.

**Figure 3.9 Laying Out the Items for Josephine**



*Figure 3.9.* Following the drafts, I started laying items and words out with pencil before gluing or using makers and ink to create Josephine's mixed media artwork. By B.L. Crawford, (2017). *Laying Out the Items for Josephine*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

**Figure 3.10 Salient Words for Josephine**



*Figure 3.10.. Once the items where places and penciled in, I started using markers to create Josephine's mixed media artwork. By B.L. Crawford, (2017). Salient Words for Josephine. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.*

You can see that with each sketch and draft, the themes and words became more focused. While I am able to show you some of the process images, I am not able to represent the thinking that took place for each of these pieces of artwork to be created. I spent most of an entire day on each of the pieces from the time I reread the transcripts until I was actually placing objects and images on the canvases. I took time to consider the placement of each word, object, and image. In my mind this helped with the categorizing and understanding the complexities of negotiating the educational systems with a language-based learning disability. I did not want the final product to be neat and orderly. I wanted to show the mistakes, lessons, overlaps, and trials that each person described to me as we talked. I thought about wabi-sabi often as I worked on these pieces. Wabi-sabi is a Japanese word that describes the ability to look at the value in the imperfections of things (Koren, 1994). I embrace this concept.



Images of the final analysis artwork are below. In each of the pieces the major themes and salient thoughts show through.

**Figure 3.11 Finished Work Josephine**



*Figure 3.11.* This is the finished mixed media artwork created during the arts-based data analysis process. Photo by N. Day, (2017). *Finished Work Josephine*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

Figure 3.12. This is the finished mixed media artwork created during the arts-based data analysis process. Photo by N. Day, (2017). *Finished Work Declan*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

## **Ethics and Reciprocity**

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

A detailed description of the purpose, risk to prospective participants and institution, research questions, and methods for studying human participants is provided. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) packet was completed and presented to the IRB at Kansas State University.

Those willing to become participants signed informed consent forms. Informed consent forms were gathered and kept separately from the interviews and other information collected, since the informed consent is signed. None of the other products contain names or identifying information. Interviews and other products are kept in a password-protected file. Consent forms are stored by the researcher under lock and key. Responses to interview questions have been entered into a computer program to be stored for five years, after which the data will be deleted. Original documents were shredded after the information was entered into the computer program. Only the researcher has access to the database. Results of the research may be shared with the scientific community through presentation and possible publication. When results are shared, information will be presented in aggregate form and will contain no names or identifying information.

### **Academic Rigor and Trustworthiness**

Academic rigor and trustworthiness are critically important issues that must be addressed in research. Using the article Qualitative Quality: Eight “Big Tent” Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research (Tracy, 2010) as a guide, this section addresses the many areas of rigor and trustworthiness. The areas addressed below include having a worthy topic, rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significance of contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence. Additionally, information from Barone and Eisner (2012) and the American Educational

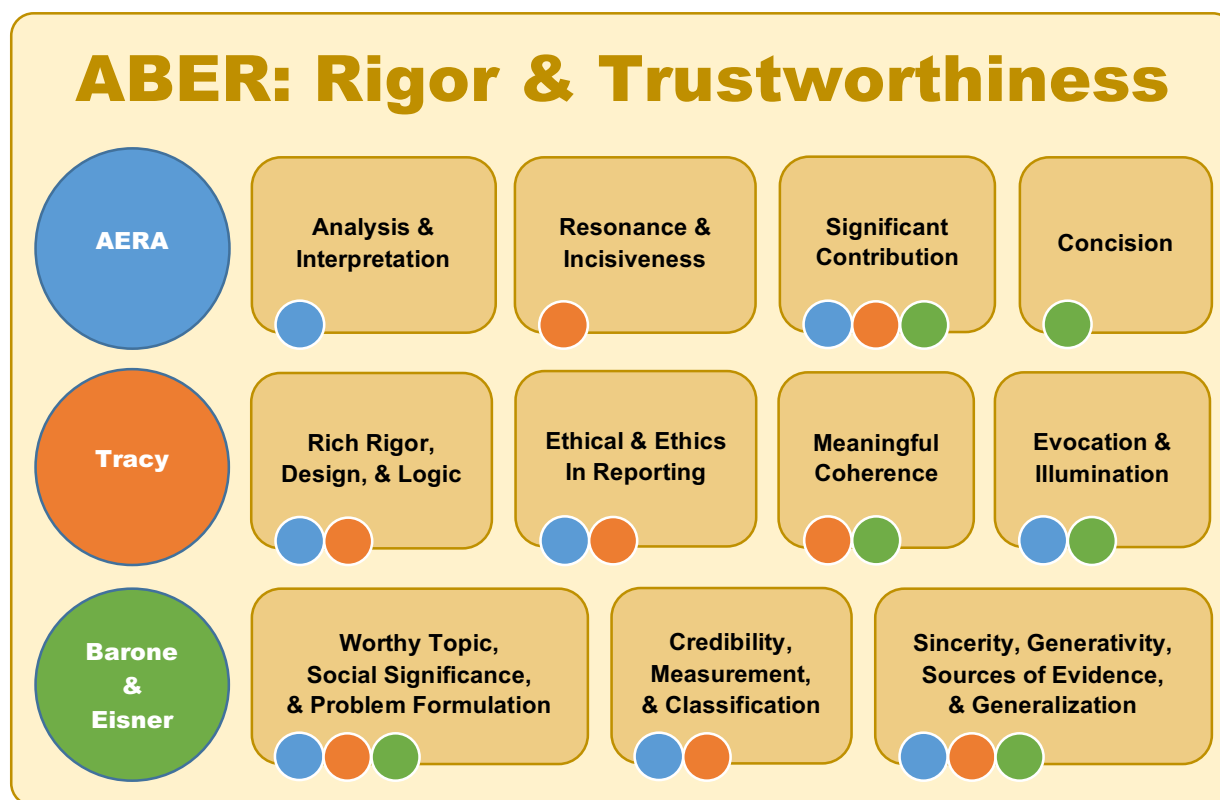
Research Association (AERA) (Standards, 2006) will be addressed. Barone and Eisner's (2012) criteria for judging arts-based research address the topics of incisiveness, concision, coherence, generativity, social significance, and evocation and illumination. The AERA Standards for reporting on Empirical Social Research (2006) cover the topics of problem formulation, design and logic, sources of evidence, measurement and classification, analysis and interpretation, generalization, and ethics in reporting. Each of these sources are considered to be highly regarded in their appropriate fields regarding quality research. Together by addressing the guidelines created for educational research, arts-based research, and qualitative research, rigor and trustworthiness are demonstrated in this study.

### **Worthy Topic, Social Significance, and Problem Formulation**

Tracy (2010) states that worthy topics of research are typically emerging from disciplinary priorities, compelling, and are personally or socially important to the researcher. This topic is relevant because there is currently a gap in the literature in the areas of special education and ABNI. There is a need to see people with disabilities as people with abilities and skills that offer them not only coping mechanisms but also spaces from where they draw strength instead of defining themselves through a deficit narrative. This research addressed the gap in the literature by creating opportunities for participants to express themselves through storytelling.



**Figure 3.13 ABER: Rigor and Trustworthiness Chart**



*Figure 3.13.* This is ABER: Rigor and Trustworthiness Chart depicting the overlaps and differences of the three sets of guidelines. Infographic by N. Day, (2017). *Finished Work Declan*. [infographic]. Copyright 2017.

Similar to worthy topics as outlined by Tracy, Barone and Eisner have outlined similar recommendations with social significance. Social significance refers to the importance of the central topic of the research. In order for there to be social significance, the arts-based researcher must choose a topic that is significant to the reader and society that needs attention (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Trivial topics should be avoided. To avoid being seen as trivial, Barone and Eisner (2012) recommend clearly explaining why a topic is importance. Because the topic chosen for this research fills a gap and shares the experiences of those with language-based

learning disabilities who choose a career in the fine arts the topic has potential social significance for those in the fields of education, art, and arts-based research.

In order to meet the criteria for AERA quality standards for problem formation, the purpose and scope of the study must be clearly stated and share how the study will contribute to the appropriate body of knowledge (Standards, 2006). In addition to clearly stating the purpose and scope of the research, it is necessary to review the relevant scholarship related to the topic to formulate the appropriate rationale for the research. This research meets these criteria by having a clearly stated purpose; a set of research questions based on the literature, and established methodology as detailed in chapters two and three. Refer to each of these chapters for additional information.

### **Rich Rigor, Design, and Logic**

High quality qualitative research is abundant, rich, and complex (Tracy, 2010). This in-depth study is based on the theoretical concepts of Identity Development, Bildungsroman, and Arts-based Narrative Inquiry. Data was collected during repeated engagement with the participant. Rigor was increased as data was collected and analyzed over a prolonged period of about five months. The sample size for the case study is two participants. Participants participated in three or four total interviews each. They both complete an initial in-depth interview. In addition to the in-depth interviews, multiple and varied data sources were collected from the participants. The participants also provided information through the creative arts bag portrait, existing art, and follow up interviews. As noted, data collection consisted of traditional and non-traditional forms of data collection and analysis to provide a deeper understanding of the content. Additionally, all of the gathered information was coded and transcribed in a manner that is described by Saldaña (2016) and Bhattacharya (2016) in their respective publications.

When additional support was necessary, I sought guidance from the methodologist on my dissertation committee. The varied and complex types of information collected from the participants and the analysis of this data provided a rich description of the experiences of the participants. This is described in detail in chapter four.

According to the AERA (Standards, 2006), to have quality design and logic the design must be specific and follow a clear line of inquiry while the data collection activities are well planned and organized. As outlined in this chapter, the purpose of this research, guiding questions, and the data collection is spelled out in a manner that is clear and thought out with enough information available for the research to be reproduced. Additionally, the logical consistency of the design has been established with scholarly justification of previous work done and alignment between different parts of the research process, such as research purpose, questions, data collection and analysis processes, and ethical issues to be considered.

### **Sincerity, Generativity, Sources of Evidence, and Generalization**

Another set of quality indicators in qualitative research, education, and arts-based research include sincerity, generativity, evidence, and generalization. Tracy (2010) outlines the following as focuses of quality qualitative research sincerity is active by being honest, vulnerable, reflective, and transparent during the entire research process. The lens in which I see myself and the world around me is described in my subjectivity statement previously in this document. In this statement, I described my values and assumptions as honestly and genuinely as possible. I continued to reflect on my own values, beliefs, and biases as I continued this process and updated the statement as necessary. I participated in journaling, peer debriefing, and member checking throughout the research and writing process to increase sincerity and to interrogate my positionality. In addition to reflecting on my own thinking and actions, I have

report the steps completed during the research process. This helped me to increase sincerity. I have included the steps that I took throughout the interviews, and other data collection processes during the study within this chapter. Information within this chapter is based on literature, my experience as a participant in a similar study, the completion of a pilot study on this topic and the completion of this dissertation study.

Generativity is the “ways in which the work enables one to see or act upon the phenomena even though it represents a kind of case study with an *n* of only 1” (Barone & Eisner, 2012 p. 152). Barone and Eisner (2012) go on to say the arts and arts-based research typically create an image or work that changes and/or sheds light on the way we see parts of the world. Generativity is created in this study by shedding light on how students with language-based disabilities have negotiated their way through the educational systems to be in an MFA program.

The sources of evidence must be clearly described including the units of study, who the participants are, and the collection of data or empirical materials, and any other unit that may be used as data (Standards, 2006). Additionally, the AERA clarifies that researchers must clearly define how this data is gathered, who gathers it, and what the purpose of the data is.

In this research, the participants are graduates of Masters of Fine Arts program whom have language-based learning disabilities. Additional information about the participants and where and how data was collected and used is explained another section of this chapter. This information is clearly defined and discussed to align with the research questions and purpose of the research.

It is critical to be clear about the “specifics of the participants, contexts, activities, data collections, and manipulations that are involved in the study” (Standards, 2006 p. 39). It is up to

the reader to determine the scope and if the information is generalizable. My chapter three clearly spells out the units, who the participants were, and the activities they participated in throughout the study.

### **Credibility, Measurement, and Classification**

Another important feature of quality in research is credibility. “Credibility refers to the trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the research findings” (Tracy, 2010, p. 842). Tracy goes on to explain that knowing that something seems true or is real is a key for the reader to trust the information presented. It is also important to help writing convey truth and realness that the descriptions of the research be “thick”. Thick description will be generated by having multiple data sources, which will include text, pictures, and artwork and an integrated narrative that will weave findings from these data sources together. These data sources are based on the assumption that the participants would have their own situated truths that may or may not always be congruent. Therefore, if issues of multivocality arise, it would be represented accurately. All data sources across participants were used for close analysis and triangulation to identify final themes.

Multiple sources of information were gathered in an attempt to triangulate the data from each of the participants. I have provided thick descriptions of the data presented by the participants. Additionally, having multiple rich sources of information add to the thickness of the information shared. I have explained the information gathered from my point of view taking into consideration my subjectivities. I have done my best to provide space and time for the participants in this study to express their own thoughts and feelings. I listened to their stories without putting words into their mouths. As stated earlier in this dissertation, I do not pretend to be value neutral without thoughts and feelings. Explained in my subjectivities statement (see

chapter three) are my experiences, interactions, and passions that have led me to complete this degree and this line of research. I have tried to avoid leading Declan and Josephine when I asked questions. I stated early on that there are no incorrect or correct answers to my prompts or questions. I encouraged each participant to share information freely. Additionally, the participants were provided a copy of the transcribed interviews and were asked to review them for accuracy. They could have also retracted or corrected any of the information they felt necessary. I respected differences of opinion. I was aware of the differences that may become known during this process. By having intense collaboration time with the participants, we were able to complete member checks and member reflections to ensure that I captured the story they intended to tell.

In addition to member reflections, to increase the creditability of this research the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The program “InqScribe,” a transcription program, and the accompanying foot pedal were used to increase the accuracy of the transcriptions will enhance this process. In addition to coding, the rich stories told by the participants, I included photographs of the participants’ artwork, creative arts bag portrait, and the mixed media work I produced as part of data analysis. These photographs offer concrete information that enhance the understanding of the reader. All of this together help to strengthen the creditability of the research.

Measurement and classification schemes must be clearly developed and described to be considered quality by the AERA (Standards, 2006). It is necessary for information about the measurement or classification tools to be accurate and justified in order to be considered high quality. How information will be used and organized once measured or collected is necessary to include in the research plan. When coding is used in the data analysis, it is necessary to describe

the training of the coders and how others, including the participants, will review it. Another sign of quality is to include transcripts in the reporting of the information.

This research addresses the quality guidelines from the AERA (2006) by clearly describing how data will be collected, evaluated and justifying the types of data collected in the research plan. As described, participants shared information with me through interviews, artwork, and the creative arts bag portrait. Transcripts of the interviews were reviewed and the participants were given the opportunity to examine all of the information collected for accuracy and understanding. Neither participant requested changes to the transcripts or other information shared. Although measurement refers to things that can be counted, here measurement is reconceptualized to things that can be documented. To that end, data collection techniques such as interviews, elicitations, creative projects, and documents are parts of products that can serve as documentation to record the participants' experiences. Further, the analysis techniques presented with a combination of traditional and arts-based approach offers ways in which experiences shared can be analyzed and the process documented. Finally, the documentation of analytic insights becomes another indicator or form which responses to research questions can be drawn.

### **Resonance and Incisiveness**

Qualitative research methods are often used to gain a deeper understanding of an issue and peoples' reactions to the issue. One way to ensure quality while gaining a deeper understanding is with incisiveness. Incisiveness is the ability to penetrate the core of the topic or "get to the heart of the social issue" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 148). The research should be helpful enabling people that come from another background to be able to relate to and understand the story told within the narrative. By using narrative inquiry to share the

experiences of the participants, the reader should be able to identify and connect with parts of the story to advance understanding the issue of language-based learning disabilities with graduate students in art.

Resonance refers to how the research affects the reader in a meaningful manner (Tracy, 2010). While it is difficult to predict in advance how a reader might react to the work, the research done will be presented in ways that are evocative, descriptive of the participants' journeys so that readers can transfer components of the narratives to their own contexts. However, whether readers will do so consistently or not cannot be predicted or controlled by the researcher at any point. Therefore, as the researcher, I am obligated to do my due diligence and have done so.

### **Significant Contribution**

As mentioned, there is a gap in the literature addressing ABNI and those with language-based learning disabilities. Additionally, information from the participants can help those in the fields of education, art, and special education to have a better understanding of how those with language-based learning disabilities negotiated their path to a career in the creative arts. Those that also have similar struggles may also identify with the experiences of the participants. By using ABNI to concentrate on issues of those with learning disabilities, an important gap will be addressed.

### **Ethical and Ethics in Reporting**

The AERA has similar ethical standards of reporting to other professional entities and journal articles in relationship to research. As expected it is required for the researcher to report the following: a) how data is collected, analyzed, and reported, b) consent from participants, c) accurately stated findings, d) data and/or empirical materials related to the findings must be



maintained, e) a statement of about any conflict of interest or bias, and f) an acknowledgement of any funding support should be included (Standards, 2006).

There is an entire section of chapter three discussing the various ethical implications of this study and the actions that I took in relation to the ethical implications. Please refer to this section. Additionally, the appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements were met prior to any data collection being carried out.

### **Meaningful Coherence**

Another way to ensure quality research is by addressing meaningful coherence. Currently meaningful coherence is presented through connecting research purpose, questions, theoretical, conceptual, and methodological frameworks in addition to research design and data management and analysis (Tracy, 2010). Once the study is completed, the meaningful coherence would be extended to findings, discussion and implication so that there is an alignment in the arguments presented.

Coherence in the arts and arts-based research is the ability for features to hang together in a strong form (Barone & Eisner, 2012). In arts and arts-based research, this could pertain to stories, music, paintings, or words. Arts-based research is “the result of a creation of expressive form that reveals qualities of life that might otherwise not have been experienced” (Barone & Eisner, 2012 p. 151). By completing an arts-based analysis of the themes from the data, a piece of art that may not have been created or experienced was produced during this research process. The themes and the mixed media artwork are closely related to each other and provide new information to the readers.

## **Concision**

In addition to providing new information, it is critical that the information be shared in a concise manner. Another sign of quality, concision is the practice of using the minimal space, or verbiage to serve the intended purpose of the art or arts-based research (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Concision was increased in this study by breaking down the information gathered into themes. After doing so, important and critical themes emerged as the story that is shared with the reader in chapter four. It would be impossible and overwhelming to share all of the information collected with the reader. Sharing concise information with the reader will enhance the understanding of the information presented.

## **Evocation and Illumination**

Sharing information in a manner that helps the reader understand and begin to feel or identify with the subject is another attribute of quality. Evocation and illumination are important criterion of quality because “it is through evocation and illumination that one begins to *feel* the meanings that the work is to help its readers grasp” (Barone & Eisner, 2012 p. 153). It is important to keep in mind in arts-based research; reading is not just referring to words. Paintings, music, sculpture, dance, and other art forms are also read. Because feelings are personal, it is difficult to predict how the reader will feel and react to this study and the products produced through data collection and analysis.

## **Analysis and Interpretation**

According to the AERA (Standards, 2006) a quality qualitative research report should contain the following information clearly explained and carried out: a) procedures used for analysis, b) analytic techniques, c) support of claims and conclusions, d) intended and unintended conclusions, e) presentation of conclusions, f) the process of developing the

descriptions, claims, and interpretations, g) practices used to develop and enhance the warrant for the claims, and h) interpretive commentary of the results. Each of these areas should be addressed and justified in as much detail as necessary to help the reader understand the all of the process and activities that took place while the data was analyzed and interpreted.

In this research, information about the specifics of how the research was actually carried out and how conclusions were arrived at are discussed in detail in chapter four. Each of the criteria listed above will be addressed to enhance the understanding of the reader.

It is apparent that there are many guidelines to follow to meet the standards to have high quality research. Saldaña (2014) describes it by saying “Qualitative research is kinda like meat loaf: ever’body got their own way of makin’ it” (p. 978). By following the quality guidelines provided by Barone and Eisner, the AERA, and for qualitative research by Tracy, I hope that the research “meat loaf” that have I created is of high quality and contribute to the appropriate bodies of knowledge.

## **Chapter Summary**

As stated the purpose of this case study is to explore how graduates of a MFA program with a language-based learning disability, discussed their coping mechanisms, career aspirations, and identity development as a result of being involved in the creative arts. This research was conducted using ABNI, ABR, and NI to share the experiences of the research participants. Arts-based data collection and analysis was used in conjunction with Bildungsroman to illustrate the experiences of the participants.

## **Chapter 4 - Findings**

Declan and Josephine are the two participants selected for this study based on the criteria for selection outlined in chapter three. They are both graduates of a Masters of Fine Arts studio program and they each have a language-based learning disability. Declan and Josephine struggled throughout their educational experiences from elementary school through terminal graduate degrees. Both continue educating others in their chosen careers. Declan and Josephine were both willing to be open and honest while sharing their strengths, weakness, successes, and struggles.

The premise of this research is that those who have struggled with a learning disability throughout their education and have completed an MFA degree can provide insight to educators and other educational stakeholders regarding learning disabilities and art. The participants were able to describe their experiences of negotiating PK-12 and higher education settings in a descriptive manner. They seemed to enjoy having someone take interest in something that has been such a struggle for them. Declan and Josephine are experts in their experiences and can speak from a perspective that a researcher cannot, especially one who does not share the same challenges while they were in school.

To begin, I have provided a descriptive vignette for each participant. This vignette provides some background information about Josephine and Declan. Narratives of each participants' experiences of negotiating educational settings are provided separately. I discuss similarities and differences between the participants as cross-case comparison. Typically, in qualitative dissertations, the findings chapter varies the most, based on the researcher's insights from data analysis and discretion about how best to present the findings. Thus, there is no standardized way to represent findings in qualitative research. Additionally, because this study is

an arts-based narrative inquiry study, it can be expected that the findings will have a creative focus integrated with the participants' narratives (Bhattacharya, 2005; Culkin, 2016; Gott, 2016; Watson, 2014). Declan's narrative is shared first because he experienced a more traditional route through PK-12 and higher education than Josephine did. Declan is younger than Josephine and had special education support and services available to him from the time he was in elementary school. Josephine was born earlier and did not receive any special education services until she attended college. Critical special education laws were passed the year Josephine began college. In the following section, I present participant descriptions and their narratives developed from the interviews, creative arts bag portraits, and shared information about existing artwork.

### **Declan's Narrative**

Declan is a white heterosexual male in his twenties from the Midwest. He is over six feet tall with a thin build. He smiles easily and has a kind voice. He prefers to wear jeans and tee shirts to corporate suits. He entered elementary school at age five after attending preschool. He then went to middle and high school in the same school district. After high school, he decided to attend a state university a few hours away from his hometown. He moved away to the university without anyone else from his graduating class, thus, forcing him to make new friendships as he settled in at his new university. Declan earned a bachelors and a master's degree in graphic design with an emphasis in painting. He attended graduate school immediately after completing his bachelor's degree at the same university.

The narrative below presents Declan's experiences in first person voice, which are combined and curated from various interviews and synthesized into thematic narratives. Declan knows and accepts his language-based learning disability. He has gained a deep understanding of how he learns best, situations to avoid that focus on his weaknesses, and how to emphasis on

his strengths. Declan was excited to share his experiences of negotiating his education with me. He was a willing participant throughout the entire process. He graduated with his MFA degree in 2014. Declan is currently an instructor of art at a community college. He has been teaching full time for three years. He started working as an instructor shortly after graduating with his MFA in graphic design, after serving as an adjunct instructor while completing his terminal degree. The narrative presents Declan's negotiations in education in his first-person voice, which are taken from various interviews and synthesized into thematic narratives. These narratives are co-constructed between Declan and myself and verified for accuracy with Declan. Please note that I kept the narratives as close as possible to the way Declan sounded in the interviews without trying to correct his grammar or sentence structure. This is because I wanted to stay true to the ways in which Declan originally spoke. At times, I might have added a word or two for clarity, but otherwise, every sentence below was spoken by Declan in almost a verbatim manner.

### **The Bag Portrait: Declan's Self-Description**

As part of this research, Declan was asked to create a creative arts bag portrait as outlined in chapter three. In this section, Declan shares how he created his bag and what the images that he chose to include on the bag mean to him.

I really like working with landscapes. I think that is clear when you look at my work. The front of my bag is a landscape coming out of a genie's lamp. The landscape is meant to convey the feeling of being super calm and serene. It is coming out of the genie's bottle because it is all sort of made up. It is what I present to the world but it is not what is really happening. There is so much more that cannot be seen or understood. The image is polished and looks as

everything is supposed to look. I would like to feel like this landscape portrays me all the time. However, I often do not.

**Figure 4.1 Front of the bag: Serene Landscape**



*Figure 4.1.* This is an image of the front of Declan’s creative arts bag portrait. Photo by N. Day (2017) *Front of the bag: Serene Landscape*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.

I decorated the handle to say “outward distance” with additional color details. I also added the words “and have a nice day” to the words “please hold both handles.” I made those parts as a graphic designer would. The bag looks more like a designed product now. Graphic designers have to think about unique ways of using typical products in a slightly different way

that does not impede the functionality of the product. That is what I did with this bag. I just added a few details to finish the product in a way that no one else would have. Many people would have just ignored the handles or those little messages that the bag manufacturers printed on the bag as a gentle reminder.

**Figure 4.2 Handle Detail of the Front of the Bag**



*Figure 4.2. Focus on the detail Declan included on the front of his bag. He included decorations on the handle to look more like a graphic design product and added greetings on the warning printed on the paper bag by the manufacturer. Photo by N. Day (2017) *Handle Detail of the Front of the Bag*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.*

I took extra measures to hide my insecurities or my backstage on the back of the bag. Not only did I do this artwork on the back of the bag, I also put it underneath the flap of the bag. If the bag is flat, there appears to be nothing on the bag except the tiny extra words I put under the words “please hold both handles.” Right underneath these words that are printed on the bag, I added the words ‘or risk destruction.’ This message has a more negative tone than the message on the front of the bag. I added the words “and have a nice day” to those words on the front of



the bag under the same messages. The words on the front are much more positive then the words on the back of the bag.

**Figure 4.3 The Hidden Back of the Bag**



*Figure 4.3.* Declan creatively hid his backstage material behind the folded flap of the paper bag. He asked with pride in his voice, if I initially thought the backside of the bag was plain. Photo by N. Day (2017) *The Hidden Back of the Bag*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.

Once the bag is stood up and unfolded, you can clearly see the parts of me that I hide from the world. I made it look as if I was literally backstage and trying to hold things in place. There are cracks, breaks, and nails coming out of the boards. I am frantically trying to keep all of the pieces together without anyone noticing. I am continuing to hide- even- hiding myself under the flap and behind the backstage, as well. I really want to keep my insecurities hidden from everyone, even those close to me. I take great lengths to do so. I have always done so. I probably always will. I also purposely chose not to use any color while drawing the image on the back side of the bag. I wanted to portray a bleak and cold hidden side of myself.

#### Figure 4.4 Revealing the Hidden Backstage



*Figure 4.4.* Once unfolded, the image that Declan used to represent his backstage is apparent. Photo by N. Day (2017) *Revealing the Hidden Backstage*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.

#### **I Think There is a Problem: Elementary School**

I lived with my parents and had a fairly typical upbringing. My family moved a few times because of my dad's job as a medical doctor. Once we settled down, I attended a Montessori preschool program and then an elementary school in a large metropolitan area in Kansas. My parents both have college degrees and my father has an advanced graduate degree. My mom and dad have been supportive of me my entire life. They even threw a dinner party for my friends when I finished my master's degree. They just invited everyone that was there at the end of at my show to dinner at a restaurant. We had so much fun. That is the kind of parents they are for me. They have been my whole life. My parents were especially supportive of me

while I was in school when I started to struggle in my classes. My mom and I spent a lot of time working with the “Hooked on Phonics” curriculum at home most nights.

Most afternoons after school, we sat at the wooden kitchen table to have a snack of apples and peanut butter. Then my mom and I would do extra reading and writing practice. One day I remember after I finished the snack, I put my dish in the dishwasher while mom got out the sturdy blue and yellow box that contained the Hooked on Phonics stuff. I sat back down at the hard table on my cushioned chair in the afternoon sun to practice with letters and words. My mom held up cards with letters on them one at a time.

I responded, “N, B, I, Q.” Not only did I say the names of the letters, I also made the corresponding letter sounds. My mom replied by flipping to the next card as she put the correct responses in a growing pile of cards.

When I answered wrong, she said, “Declan this is “T and it makes the sound tuh” in a reassuring voice than she would tuck the card behind the others in her hand for me to practice again and the lesson continued.

When I completed all of the cards, I read a passage aloud to my mom, “Camryn went to the store while her puppy named Brett followed along. Her dad walked beside him carrying the empty gro...groc...grow...grrrr bag.” In a frustrated tone, I announced. “This is STUPID. I do not understand why I need to know this stuff anyway.”

Calmly, mom replied as she pointed to the word that I had deemed stupid, “Declan the word you are trying to read is grocery.”

As I balled up my fists in frustration, she sweetly touched my shoulder with one hand while prompting me with the other hand where I should pick up my reading. She would start the next sentence for me, “They were headed to buy...”

When my parents figured out I was still struggling in school with reading, writing, and spelling even after extra work with “Hooked on Phonics,” they sought support from the school as well as hired a tutor to work with me outside of school. I worked with a tutor for seven or eight years. My teachers agreed with my parents. They saw me struggling in school. I was failing spelling tests and mixing up words when I writing.

Mr. Komark was six feet three inches tall, who was my second-grade teacher with hair that always seemed windblown and out of place as the hair of men in their late forties seems to do. He kept students in line with his gruff sense of humor and funny games to teach us current events. One day after I had turned in a writing assignment about the phases of the moon, he came to my desk with my paper in hand and asked me in front of everyone in class, “Declan, what happened on this paper?”

As I lowered my head, I looked at the page covered in red marks that he placed on the short desk I sat in near the edge of the room. In a weak voice I responded, “I tried to finish the prompt you gave us about the moon. It was fine when I handed, Mr. Komark, I promise.”

Mr. Komark explained, “Declan, this word is not ‘moon.’ You wrote ‘woon’ over and over. Also, this sentence does not make sense. I am not sure what you are trying to tell me with this entire paragraph.”

While shaking my head, I said, “I am sorry. I will do better. I did not mean to write this way.”

“I understand. Just read this to me to help me understand.” Mr. Komark said.

I tried reading my messy second grade writing. I could not read my own writing and figure out what it said.

Mr. Komark followed up in a soft voice as he put the yellow paper behind his back, “It is okay, Declan, just tell me about the moon.”

I looked up at the tall man with suspicion and started talking. I told him all about the phases of the moon and how the earth and light cause shadows on the moon.

Mr. Komark simply said, “Thank you. I knew you understood the phases of the moon.” Then he walked back to his desk after a reassuring touch on my desk.

I felt relieved and confused at the same time. How could I have all of the answers in my head but my fingers could not get them to go on that yellow piece of paper.

Since then, I tried to avoid reading aloud as much as possible. I did not even want to read when it was just the teacher and I alone together. The special education team found my reading, writing, and spelling skills were lagging behind my peers’ skills despite me receiving tutoring outside of school. I officially started receiving special education services in the fourth grade. I did not grasp that I had a learning disability when I was a child. I did not understand what that meant until I was older. I did not know or understand what dyslexia was. I just knew it was hard for me to read, spell, and write. It looked so easy for my friends and classmates. This perplexed me. I was working on and trying at least as hard as they were every day.

I did know I was terrible at spelling tests, like REALLY awful. I studied and studied and still rarely did well on the tests. I would study and attempt to memorize the patterns of the words as the teachers tried to teach me. Despite all of my work, I had little success when it came time to take the spelling quizzes. By the time I was in upper elementary school, I had devised a way to cheat on the spelling tests to improve my grade. This was the only way I felt any success with spelling. I know it was not the right thing to do but it helped it survive.

In addition to struggling with the actual spelling of the words, I was never sure how to make the letters go the right direction. The letters that could be flipped to become another letter, were the most difficult to work with for me. Often “p” would become “q” or a “b” easily. I would be so embarrassed when others read my work and the wrong letter was on the page. I would intend to write the correct answers but it did not always turn out that way. I would ask myself what happened, it made no sense. I knew it was wrong but not usually in the moment that I wrote the wrong thing down. I was never a fluent reader. Comprehension of text content was not a weakness for me. I understood what I read or what others read to me. I love listening to stories read aloud. I was not a fluent reader at all. Because of my dyslexia, I scored poorly on tasks that required fluency. But I did okay with comprehension of information when I heard the information.

Additionally, I was laboring privately with tasks that required reading and writing, I suffered publically. When I was young, sometimes I struggled with speaking sensibly. My friends and other students in class made fun of me when I read aloud.

My third-grade teacher was Mrs. Ryan. She was one of my favorite teachers in elementary school. She was short, kind, probably in her thirties, and her clothes were colorful and always matched her shoes. One day, we started reading the book “How to Eat Fried Worms” as a group with Mrs. Ryan. We read a chapter or so each day aloud. I knew the routine. I was going to have to take my turn and read in front of EVERYBODY.

Jimmie, who sat at the first desk started, “Hey, Tom! Where were you last night? Yeah, you missed it. Alan and Billy came up the front walk. Tom was sitting on this porch steps...”

Linda, the girl with short brown, curly hair, in the next row read, “Billy flopped down on the grass, chunky, snub-nosed, and freckled. Salmon casserole’s not so bad. Wouldn’t she let

you just eat two bites? asked Alan. Sometimes my mother says, well, all right, if you just eat two bites...”

Others in my class had taken their turns and I knew my turn was coming. Of course, everyone else had done a great job of reading. I knew I would be the only one that would mess up reading. I was so worried for it to be my turn to read. I barely comprehended what the others had read. My hands were sweaty. I rubbed my hair to try to dry them off. It did not work.

I mumbled, “Ugh” as it became my turn.

I started, “Tom sugared.”

Mrs. Ryan corrected me, “shrugged.” I did not even notice I was wrong until she corrected me.

I continued reading. “How about the mud? Alan asked Billy. You wouldn’t eat a bit of dumb.”

Jeffery, the boy next to me that always wore red sneakers, asked, “Who wants a bite of DUMB?”

EVERYONE in the room started snickering and laughing. I knew that I had screwed up. When my classmates were laughing, I stopped reading. I just stopped. Mrs. Ryan encouraged me to keep reading. But I had lost my spot on the page. I did not even know what line I was supposed to be reading. I started flipping pages of the orange covered book. Mrs. Ryan came back to the edge of the room to my desk and tried to help me find my spot. It was pointless now. She realized this too. I just stared at the wall where the bulletin board had the colorful chore list and daily schedule on it and tried to escape talking or reading.

Mrs. Ryan raised her voice to calm the students, “Chuck, go ahead and pick up where Declan left off, please.”

Chuck began, “Alan argued a lot, small, knobby-kneed, nervous, gnawing at his thumbnail, his face smudged, his red hair mussed, shirttail hanging out, shoelaces untied. Sure, I would, Billy said. Mud. What's mud? Just dirt with a little water in it. My father says everyone eats a pound of dirt every year anyway...”

Later that day, I was at the water fountain getting a cold drink of water minding my own business walking towards my locker. Suddenly I felt a thud of a hand on my back. I turned around and it was Jeffrey from class earlier. He put his arm around me as if he was trying to push me down and said, “You need that drink, because maybe the drink isn’t dumb, and what you eat must be only dumb stuff that gets in your brain, which must be why you cannot read. You are so DUMB!”

It didn’t even make sense what Jeffrey said. But that did not matter to me. It hurt anyway. My head was full of doubt. I hated it. I just wanted that day to be over and for everyone to forget how dumb I was. I proved to everyone I was dumb by saying dumb aloud. I was so stupid I could not even read. I was often ashamed when I said words that became mixed up and came out ridiculously and not at all as I intended. This hurt my feelings. I hated it when people made fun of me. I suppose everyone does but I did not see others getting made fun of like I was made fun of.

I remember about the same time that I struggled with reading and writing, I became interested in art. I often redrew pictures from books and created my own storybook characters when I was avoiding reading. I would draw the characters as a work around to actually knowing the words that I was supposed to be reading. After first copying the drawings from books, I eventually started creating and drawing my own characters on my own time, not just to avoid reading. I have continued to do so as I have grown as an artist. I still incorporate childlike



characters and stories in my artwork. I love looking at things through a child's eyes. I used this type of drawing even into graduate school.

I did not love elementary school; however, it was apparent that my classmates did not have the same struggles I did with reading and writing. I had to work much harder than them to get the same work done. I wish all of the extra help and tutoring would have solved my reading problems right away. I know it helped, but just I wanted to be like everyone else.

But because I could not be like everyone else, I wanted to **hide**.

**Hide** from my problems.

**Hide** from the mean kids.

**Hide** from the teachers I disappointed.

**Hide** from the extra practice.

I wish I would have understood that I learned differently. I wanted my friends and classmates to understand that I was as smart as they were for the most part. I just needed extra help and different instruction with reading and writing than most people. I wanted other children to know that people learn differently and that it does not make someone stupid. People with disabilities just learn differently.

### **So Much Work and Attempting to Master Memorization: The Teen Years**

I continued to draw as much as I could as I grew older. It was still hard for me to read, write, and speak in front of others. I did not “grow out of” my academic troubles as I was hoping. I had to learn to cope and work through the hard stuff. I still had extra help in school and a tutor came to work with me a few times a week at home. The help I received gave me new ideas of ways to work through my problems. I knew that I simply had to memorize all names and dates. It was so hard for me to learn them in another way. For example, when I was

learning to memorize facts, the tutor would help me match words or dates with an image to help me remember the information when it was necessary to recall. I was also starting to figure out some tricks on my own too. I started to realize that I could use my visual skills to improve the way I memorized things without a tutor or someone else showing me how to make the connections. This was helpful when I needed to learn something and used it more immediately than if I was going to use it for an exam or something similar.

When I got older, I ascertained that memorization was key for me to learn and understand information. I know that it took longer for me to memorize information than it took for my classmates. I would practice things seven to ten times a day to prepare for exams. It took me forever to prepare for a play. I learned that if I could make something visual it was easier for me to memorize or learn. I pretended that the words are pictures and it helped me to remember them. I still do sometimes. My tutor, Scott, was a college student at the local university majoring in education. He was probably around twenty years old when I met him. He had blonde messy hair that he ran his fingers through unconsciously to keep it out of his eyes. He was patient with me, as I was with him. He ran on his own time schedule and often came late to work with me. Being late never seemed to bother him at all and I became accustomed to it with time. Scott helped me use visual cues to learn and memorize information for performances. I made up a visual story that kind of went along with the text so that it was easier for me to remember. Once when I was studying volcanos for a project and I could not figure out all of the detail necessary to pass the test. He helped me learn about volcanos using visual cues.

Scott revealed how he learned the different types of volcanos, “There are three types of volcanos, shield volcanos, stratovolcanoes, and cinder cones. Shield volcanos are flat and wide like a shield a warrior would carry. Stratovolcanoes are high and pointed and explode violently.

Visualize a straight ruler. The word “straight” sounds a bit like ‘strato’ or ‘straight-o’. Picture a ruler going up a volcano. Cinder cones are an easy volcano to remember because they are small and erupt small cinders.”

My eyes got big and I nodded, “Scott, this makes sense. Let me draw this out.”

Excitedly, I drew out the types of volcanos in my green science notebook. With the combination of the drawings and the visual story Scott shared with me, I knew I could pass the science exam on Friday. In fact, I still remember the types of volcanos because of the visual Scott let me in on.

Because of the more visual nature of science content in classes, I liked a lot. Scientific topics always tended to appealing to me. I think I liked the science classes because there seemed to be a visual story for me to follow. There were also more hands-on activities and diagrams in science. The visual images really helped me understand and make sense of what was going on and what was expected of me. However, math was more difficult for me, especially the higher-level courses. I did not get the visuals as much with the math computation and problems. Geometry was okay. I usually understood it. I think it was because math was less about actual number and more about formulas and theorems as it got harder. There was so much more reading that needed to be done to complete the actual math work than seemed necessary. I know why the reading was necessary, I just did not want to have to figure out the reading and the math for each problem. Math is supposed to be hard in school. I understood that fact. But with the added reading that was necessary it made it twice as hard

I was really nervous about giving required speeches at school. I had flashbacks of oral reading in elementary school. To overshadow the fact that writing and speaking was so hard for me, I often found myself making visual aids that were really amazing to compensate for my weaknesses. My visual aids were always better than my classmates, if they even had any. I

often made them even if they were not required of me for the assignment. I made great posters or dioramas when I needed to speak to my classmates or others to try to cover up the awkwardness I felt while presenting. I could distract the class and the teacher if I made a mistake while presenting.

In the tenth grade, I had to take Mrs. Kaveler's English class. I really liked her she was in her late thirties and challenged me in a supportive way. She sat on her desk and wore really high heels with pencil skirts and jackets. But her class was not easy. We often had to do research for our projects. Once she even took us to the university library to learn about journal articles. It seemed like we were always writing papers for her. One project in particular, I was assigned the task of giving a persuasive speech on the importance of routine car maintenance. I research and prepared my information with the help of my parents. I even created a poster with images. It was not a requirement of the class to do so, however, I knew I needed something to hide from when I stood in front of the teacher's desk to talk for the assigned seven-minute time slot.

On presentation day, I wore jeans with no holes and a button up red plaid shirt. My mom suggested a tie before I left the house. I resisted because a tie would make me feel stuffy and more nervous than I already was. I walked into room 121 with my poster and hid it behind my desk in the back of the room. My hands were sweating as I fidgeted in my cold blue chair and leaned on the hard back. The desk had a heart carved in it that I stared at to avoid eye contact with Mrs. Kaveler. There was no way I wanted to give my talk first.

Mrs. Kaveler stood up on her very high heels, "Theresa, please start the class with your presentation."

Theresa got up on cue. She turned to face the class and started presenting her persuasive argument on why daily exercise is important. After Theresa sat down. It was Leo's turn to present with notecards in hand about. Then it was Neanda's turn. Followed by Brenda. Then it happened.

Mrs. Kaveler reminded me, "Declan, you are next."

"Uhh. I have a poster too," as I stumbled to the front of the classroom. If the door had been open, I might have just walked out. I clumsily held my notecards and the poster at the same time in front of the entire sophomore English class as they stared at me with blank looks on their faces.

"Scheduled routine maintenance is important for a car because it will help your car last longer. It is necessary to change the oil and rotate the tires at the recommended time..." After only two minutes the presentation, I dropped the notecards. One went under Mrs. Kavlar's desk. One was under Lanie's desk. Two were behind Malcom's books on the floor. I could not get them. The clock was ticking. My grade was dropping.

"Declan, go ahead and finish. We need to move on to Donald."

"Uhh. The cards are gone."

"Go ahead without them. You should know this information without them."

"I don't," I stammered as I held the poster awkwardly in one hand. Then I realized I had the poster in my hand. I held it up with pride for everyone to see.

As I pointed to the images of the oil can and a calendar of car maintenance I created the weekend before, I started, "The engine works better when... and this is why you should all know when and where you should get maintenance done on your cars and trucks."

"Thank you, Declan. Please be seated. Donald, your turn."

I took the poster and left the cards on the floor and took my seat in the back row. With the poster tucked behind my chair, I realized I had done it. I finished the presentation without the notes that I had labored over. No one seemed to notice much.

After class, Andrew, a lanky kid in the high school band asked, “Did you actually draw that poster all by yourself?”

I held up the poster board covered in images of oil cans, tires, and cars with pride. “I did. I had reference material but I did not trace anything. I drew it all free handed.”

“Nice,” he said as he walked away.

I took note of this interaction. This worked out well for me. I was so nervous and I knew I would mess up and I did. But it ended up turning out really well. No one else had a poster. No one mentioned my cards falling all around the classroom. Andrew even commented on my drawings. When Mrs. Kaveler graded my presentation, she awarded extra points to me for the added visual aid I used. This was a good day to be Declan. I had finally come across a way to overcome my weaknesses.

During this time, I also struggled with standardized tests. I had to take the ACT test to be able to apply for college. It was the worst. I practiced. I took ACT prep courses to help me score better. I took it over and over. I never finished the reading section of the exam. I always ran out of time and could not finish answering the questions. I did okay on the math portion of the exam. I did well with the basic core math skills but I knew I would never major in business. I think the highest score I got was a 22<sup>1</sup>. I finally stopped taking the exam after four times. I did worse each time. My scores kept getting lower. If they had had an exam where I could draw

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<sup>1</sup> The ACT is an exam that helps predict if a student is ready to attend college. The average composite score in Kansas in 2015 was 21.9. (ACT, 2017)

pictures, I would have kicked butt. I would have NAILED it! But no one ever measured my art skills until art school. By this time, I had figured out that math and reading were not my strengths so it made sense for me to major in the arts. My parents supported my decision to major in the arts. They would have been supportive no matter what I chose to major in college. I think they just want me to be happy and they knew art would help me to be happy throughout my life. I remember my parents telling me that I could major in almost anything I wanted to in college. The possibilities all the sudden seemed endless.

My dad was sitting in his recliner, “Declan, you can pick any major you want when you attend college.” This seemed strange to me.

From my spot on the couch with my feet on the homework covered coffee table I said, “Anything, Dad? Chad’s parents want him to become a business major and he can only apply to schools with a good business program and Genea is only allowed to apply to colleges in town. But you are going to let me choose the college and my major?” I thought this was too good to be true. I knew some of my friends were struggling with their parents’ desires for them.

Dad nodded, “Really” as he took a sip of his steaming coffee.

From across the tidy living room, I said, “Dad, this seems too good to be true.”

He put his coffee down next to him on the lamp stand and explained, “Declan, my parents decided when I was very young that I was going to become a physician. I knew this my entire life. I could not even think about another major. I knew I would go to college as a premed student and finish with medical school. My parents choose my classes in high school to make sure I was ready for college. While I like my job now, I hated being forced into a career. My life has and still focuses on a decision my parents made for me when I was a child. I have always sworn that I would not make this decision for my children.”

I sat back on the plush couch and grabbed a throw pillow. I tried to take in what my father had just shared with me. He had just given me permission to choose.

I simply replied, “Thank you.”

My mind was spinning with the possibilities that were now available to me. I assumed that I knew I could choose my college and major but it was an entirely different thing to be directly told this information. Maybe my parents had assumed that I would be an art major. Looking back, I feel like they knew or they knew it would at least they probably thought it was a possibility. Not all parents are supportive of their kid becoming an art major. There are a lot of stereotypes that come with being an art major. People have teased me about taking the easy way through college or that I became an art major so I could smoke pot. Neither of these accusations are true. However, because of these and other stereotypes, I have had to defend my choice of major to others but never my parents. I am thankful for this gift from my parents. It was freeing to be able to choose for myself.

Around the same time that I was struggling so much in school, I continued to draw and my interest in art increased. I have always liked drawing and doodling. I would draw and make up games just for fun. I liked art classes except in high school. I did not like my high school art teacher, but I still took art classes. I did not let the fact that I was not a fan of the teacher stop me from taking the classes that covered the content that I loved so much. Another teacher in high school, Mr. Lynn, told me about graphic design. Mr. Lynn was an older teacher that retired a couple of years after I was in his class. He took me to meet with a local graphic designer, Mr. Day, to learn about the profession. He wore baggy khaki pants and button up shirts with tiny plaid patterns. He was patient with all of his students. I think it is because he was also our driver’s education teacher. He really got to know us when we spent all that time driving around



and learning to parallel park. I guess I shared some of my interests with Mr. Lynn while we were out driving because a few weeks later he asked if I wanted to go meet his friend, Mr. Day, a graphic designer. I checked with my mom and dad and we made the visit downtown later that week. Mr. Day was a bald man in his early forties who wore jeans and tee shirts with pockets on them. He was very laid back and knowledgeable about his field, and very willing to put up with seemingly endless questions from a certain high school kid.

While riding in a warm black truck on the way back from the downtown meeting in with the graphic designer Mr. Lynn asked, “So, what do you think about meeting Mr. Day and hearing about his job?”

“That was great. He was so nice. He answered all of my questions. Did you see the huge computer on his desk?”

“Yes. He has a lot of technology in his office.”

“His job looks as if he has a lot of fun. Everyone worked together in a big room with so many computers and models of projects laying around. Those videos he showed us were really cool. Working there looks a lot better than being in high school all day.”

I am so glad Mr. Lynn took the time to do this for me. It was a great experience. I thought it sounded like a good idea to study graphic design in college. When I was in high school, I loved playing video games and I thought that I would learn to make video games if I became a graphic designer. This seemed like a perfect plan to me. I later found out that this was incorrect. Graphic design is not all about making video games. But as a teenager, it made perfect sense to find a job in which I could make video games all day. It would have been a dream job.

I had become tired of high school by the time I was a senior. I suppose most students do. But I think it was worse for me than most. Not only was I was ready to move on to something new, I was also tired of second guessing myself all the time. I was tired of having everyone look after me and make sure I understood everything. I guess it helped sometimes but it became frustrating to need more help than my classmates. I felt like everyone noticed the teachers and paras helping me more than other students. I stuck out among my friends and classmates. No one wants to stick out like that in high school. Especially, not me. All the help really made me feel like I did not fit in much but I knew I needed that help. It can be humiliating to be different, especially for teenagers.

I guess, I ended up doing okay in middle school and high school because I had help from my parents, tutors, and teachers. I learned a lot about myself and how to figure things out and started to compensate for my weaknesses. I started to figure out what dyslexia was and that I did not learn like others do. It was a lot to overcome especially for a kid that just wanted to be able to read and write like everyone else. I wish school had been easier for me. I knew I would graduate, but I knew it would take a lot of work and assistance from others that I was not keen on others knowing I needed it. I am glad no one knew how much work it really took me to get things done correctly. I do not mind sharing now, but at the time, I did not want to be different from my friends.

### **Moving on without an IEP: Undergraduate Education**

After high school, I went to college without any of my friends. I had to adjust to life on my own for the first time and get used to a new place and new people. I did not have the safety net of having my familiar teachers, tutors, or parents to help me with my homework. Luckily, I made the right choice when I chose my undergraduate institution. Except for the normal

growing pains of moving to college, I adjusted just fine. I am thankful for a fairly easy transition to college.

Being able to make college and major choice was huge for me as a teenager, as I suppose it is for most high school students. The news my dad gave me made me adjust my thinking. While adjusting to a new educational setting, I realized that when I was in high school, most of the decisions were made for me. I may have picked an elective or two each semester but nothing like choosing a whole college or a major. That was new to me. I thought, oh I like drawing so I will take art classes. I also visited with the graphic designer in town and that seemed fascinating to me. I looked at the state schools in Kansas and figured out which one had the best art program. The program also had some good scholarships available for me. That is how I chose my college and major. It worked out well for me. There were so many placement tests in college to help choose a major but I stayed with art. It was easy for me to draw and complete art projects for the most part. I NEVER changed my major. Like I said, I thought that if I became a graphic designer I would develop video games. This is not true. Graphic design is about advertising, products, using images in creative manners, and communicating with others using images. However luckily, I ended up liking the graphic design courses. I felt like I could make money if I became a graphic designer. Graphic designers can make good money and can usually find steady work compared to artists in other concentrations. It was a fluke for me to pick and stick with graphic design. The best kind of fluke. It worked out for me in the end.

Part of the reason it worked out was because I had services for my dyslexia while I was in college. During the first week of classes during my freshmen year I visited the disability services office. My mom and Ms. Wilson, my high school special education teacher, encourage me to meet with the office. Ms. Wilson even made me an extra copy of my last IEP to take to

college with me to show them the services I received in high school. When I walked into the bright room I noticed the coolness from the air conditioner as it was a contrast to the hot August weather I had just come from in the quad. I met Dr. Weaver. He was a slender man with a receding hairline who wore a gray suit, a bow tie, and colorful socks peaked out from under the hem of his slacks.

Dr. Weaver and I walked to his office as he greeted me, “Declan, how is your first week of college going so far?”

I nervously responded, “Okay. Did you know that you can eat all you want in the cafeteria in the residence hall?”

“Yes. Isn’t that nice?”

“I had pizza and cereal last night for supper!”

He laughed as we entered his cozy office. There were plants in the window and he used lamps instead of the florescent overhead lights. He also had a couch and an end table opposite his desk. Dr. Weaver asked me for my paperwork and asked me to have a seat. I chose a soft black chair across from his desk. While he flipped through my papers from high school, I looked around his office. There were beavers all over the place. Beavers on the notebooks. Beavers on the business cards. Stuffed beavers on the shelf. It dawned on me that since I was at a school with beaver as a mascot, I would probably get beaver covered items too.

Dr. Weaver looked up at me. Could he tell that I was nervous? “Declan, we can help you.” I sighed with relief. He continued, “With the information you shared with me from your high school IEP, I have a better understanding of your strengths and weaknesses. I will craft a letter to send to each of your instructors each semester letting them know that you need extended time for exams and some assignments, you can get the notes in advance of class, and you can

take your tests down the hall in that room we walked past. Then you can take as much time as you want without interruptions.”

I responded hesitantly, “Okay” as I looked at the beavers again.

Dr. Weaver said, “Declan, this is a good thing. My office helps many students with similar learning issues. It is our job to help you be successful here. We will not tell anyone why you need the help. We just tell the instructors that you have, your advisor, and no one else.”

With less hesitation, I unclasped my hands and nodded at him.

He repeated, “I am here to help you. If you have concerns as you progress with your education come and talk to me. Make an appointment and we can figure out what to do to help you with your classes.”

I took Dr. Weaver’s business card with the beaver on it. I left feeling surer of myself as I walked back into the hot Kansas sun headed for my next class campus map in hand.

After that visit during the first week of classes, I did use some of the services offered. I got extended time on exams. I think I was supposed to get notes ahead of time but it never worked out that way. I thought it would be embarrassing to ask the professor for this, so I never did and no professor ever offered them to me. I tried to tough it out without drawing too much attention to myself and my disability. I was also supposed to be able to take exams in a secluded and quiet area. I think I only took a couple of art history exams in a separate location. I think I would have had to have gone to another building during class time when the test was supposed to be taken. It would look like I was missing every testing class day. I was afraid people would think that I was a bad student. I did not want to stick out from my peers. Because I had a learning disability and learning took so long and tended to be frustrating, it frustrated me when my classmates would miss multiple classes and I still do. It still drives me crazy when my

students are able to skip multiple courses with seemingly little or no consequences. I did NOT have that as an option. I needed to attend each and every class. Even when I attended every class, it still took me forever to do all of the readings and assignments. However, I planned for the extra time as necessary. At the university I attended, the art students are always on campus. At all times of day and night you will find art students in the building. For me to have to work all the time did not stick out from the other art students. This helped me to feel like I fit in with the others in the art programs.

Once I thought I had it all figured out. I was working on my computer when a pop-up screen appeared. It was for a speed-reading program. I clicked on the advertisement and it took me to the website. I had found a shortcut to becoming a better reader. My problems were about to be solved.

That night I called my parents. “Mom, I found a program to help me read faster online.”

“Oh, you did.”

“I found out that I would be able to read 3.471 times faster and my comprehension will be improved by the time I finished the program. Mom, the program promised step-by-step training and guaranteed results. This will be perfect. It is just what I need. I bought it this afternoon.”

With skepticism she responded, “I hope this works well for you.”

It did not help as I had hoped. In fact, I do not think it helped at all. I guess the program was supposed to teach me to skim words quickly to find the important parts to read and move on to the next section. After completing the tutorials, I was still a very slow reader despite trying to learn the tricks covered in the program. I was not a good enough reader to read at an average

speed, let alone skim entire pages to determine what is actually important. I thought it would at least help me to have average reading skills. However, I was wrong.

Another key to my success, was that I really liked the group of students that I took classes with in the graphic design program. Through classes and projects, we built a lot of camaraderie. I think these relationships helped to keep me in the design program. I made friends really quickly and some of us still keep in touch and remain friends. I kind of felt like I did not belong in the program for the first three years academically. I felt like I was always behind or missing something. I used my classmates to help me make sure I was not missing anything. I learned early on this was necessary for me. I spent so much time in class focusing on taking the notes, sometimes I would miss key elements such as due dates or certain expectations. To avoid this from happening, I always checked and double-checked with my peers and instructors to make sure I got all of the details. I also tried to pay back these favors with my classmate when I could. I did not want to take advantage of their kindness. My friends helped me to stick with it, keep working, and stay in the program. Around the time I was in my third year of college, I really completed a project that I was proud of. It probably should have happened sooner in the program. I think the way the program is currently at my undergraduate university is now much pickier and I may not have made it through the graphic design program. I assume would have cut me from the program because I was so slow to catch on. It is highly competitive now. I was in the program at the right time for me and my weaknesses. Thank goodness.

Another area that I was still weak at was presenting. As all college students are required, I had to give speeches in different classes. I had to do many presentations as a graphic design student. We had to practice giving product speeches to each other and our instructors to prepare present to the businesses and the departments that I did work for. I remembered what I did in

high school when I needed to present and used visual aids as much as possible when I had to talk in front of others. This of course was perfect in the graphic design program. After a while, I got over being so nervous when I gave speeches or presented in public. It was easier talking in front of people when I was not writing and reading something. I became confident in my artwork. I could present about something that I was proud of doing. I loved graphic design so while it could be nerve-wracking to present to clients or committees, I also got to sit behind a screen and show my work that I knew was good. It was easier for me to present in this manner. I could focus on the visuals and not weaker skills of reading and speaking in front of people. This became helpful when I presented to actual businesses.

Luckily, the school that I chose to do my undergraduate work has many strong ties with graphic design professionals and companies. Some of these companies are in major metropolitan areas across the United States. I was able to work through internships and partnerships as an undergraduate to build my skills. I worked in Washington D.C. with one of these companies while I was still a student. This was an amazing opportunity for me. In addition to working in D.C. one summer, people from other departments and offices across campus often needed graphic designers to help with projects. I always said yes to any offer that the graphics professor came to me with.

Ms. Karr the graphic design professor was kind and reminded me of a grandmother with her curly gray hair and a sweet smile. She probably could have retired a few years ago but seemed to have plenty of energy to keep up with undergraduate students. She is well respected in the field of graphic design. Ms. Karr came into our slightly cluttered class on a Tuesday in September. “Does anyone want to volunteer to help with a homecoming project?”

“Yes,” I said as I raised my hand.



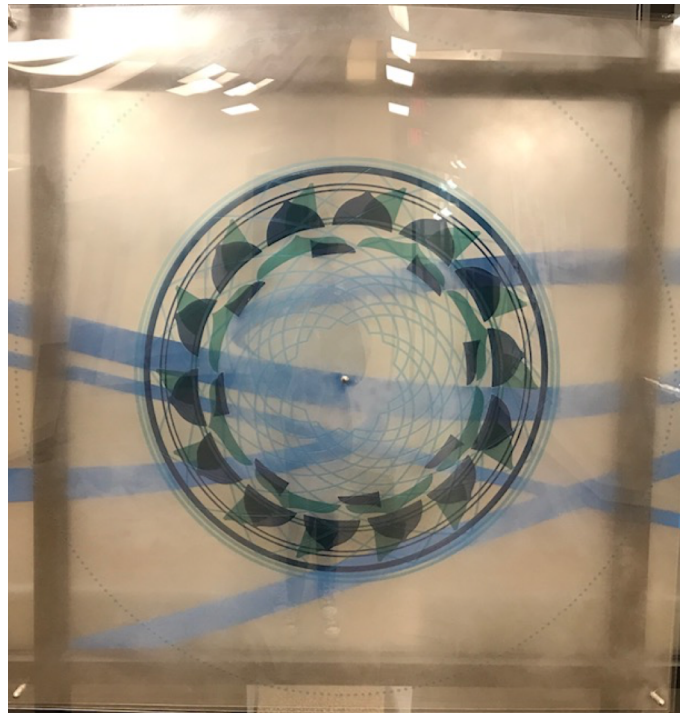
She handed me a business card with the beaver on it from a department I was not familiar with on campus, “Contact Dr. Sanders before Friday. Tell him that I sent you.”

I slipped the card into the front of the Basic Designs in Art textbook as she started class.

“Show me your progress on project number three.”

This led me to make connections and have experiences that I would not have otherwise had. I worked with the Justice Studies Department and Student Health Center. In fact, Student Health Center still has a large installation of my commissioned artwork on display at the college. Here is an image of the work that is still displayed at the college.

**Figure 4.5 Student Heath Center Commissioned Artwork**



*Figure 4.5. This is an image of one of three panels that were commissioned by the Student Health Center on Declan’s campus while he was a student. Photo by B.L. Crawford, (2017). Student Heath Center Commissioned Artwork. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.*

The graphic design program was not really what I thought it would be like. I did not end up making video games, but I was able to learn how to make money as an artist. Despite questioning myself throughout the program I became pretty good at graphic design. I do not think that I would have been as successful if I had majored in other departments, like English or another area that required a lot of reading and writing. The help from disability services office as a positive experience while I was on campus. Near the end of my bachelor's degree I went to visit Dr. Weaver again. He and I had talked off and on while I was in school when we saw each other on campus or if I made an appointment.

“Dr. Weaver, I am worried about graduating. I am not sure what I want to do.”

“Tell me more, Declan.”

“I feel like I just figure out college. I finally feel comfortable here.”

“What do you want to do for a career?”

“Something with art, graphic design, I suppose.” I shrugged my shoulders.

“Have you thought about applying to the graphic design graduate program here?”

“Do you think I would get accepted? Would I be able to finish the program?”

“Declan, you will get the same services you have been. You know most of the instructors...Go home and think about this for a while.”

But I was not ready to go work in the REAL world when I finished my undergraduate degree. I needed to grow more personally. I think it took me so long to catch on to what I was supposed to be doing in the art program while learning to live away from home, I was not ready for change yet. I was happy to finish the BFA but was not ready to move away and start learning a new job, new city, and new friends yet. I applied to attend the graduate program in the familiar setting that had been my home for the last four years.

## **Almost Mastering Education, Finally: Masters of Fine Arts**

I decided to go to graduate school instead of finding a job after I finished my Bachelors of Fine Arts (BFA) degree. I think it took so much extra time for me to take in and learn information. When I finished my undergraduate degree, I knew I was not ready to go into the job market. I felt young and needed time to mature. I just needed more time. Just like everything else in school, I needed more time to be where my classmates were. I decided to go to graduate school and earn an MFA. I applied and was accepted. In most areas of art an MFA is a terminal degree. This is true for graphic design. I knew if I had an MFA in addition to my bachelor's degree, it would open up additional job opportunities for me. Since I did not know what I wanted to do for sure, gaining more opportunities seemed like the best option for me to follow.

**Figure 4.6 Self Portrait of Declan**



*Figure 4.6.* Declan painted a self-portrait as part of the requirements for his MFA degree. By Declan, (2017). *Self Portrait*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

This is a self-portrait that I painted. I did this work while I was in graduate school. I like the way it turned out. It is somewhat abstract and colorful. I used thick paint to give it more texture character. The hair is messy. The background is messy. I think this shows how I often felt in graduate school and probably sometimes still now. There was a lot going on all the time. There was a lot of thinking, planning, and art. Nothing much was clear cut and easy. Just like life. But there are a few areas that seem very orderly. For example, look at the lettering. I was learning a lot of new information during this period. I was learning new art skills in courses that were not available to me before graduate school. In addition to new art skills, I took other art related classes such as art history. Art history was a class that kept my head swirling for sure.

**Figure 4.7 Jef Grey's, Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaia at Wiels**



*Figure 4.7.* This is an example of a piece of artwork that Declan struggled with learning the name of the artist. Because he had difficulty with names that did not follow patterns he was familiar.

As a graduate student, art history was the most difficult area for me to study. I had to know the concepts and particular styles of art, which was fine. I REALLY struggled with the dates and places that I was supposed to learn. It was necessary for me to learn factual information that did not seem to tie to anything. There were so many names and dates to keep in my head. Information that was completely new to me was the hardest for me to learn. For example, I really struggled to learn the names of Eastern Artists. I could not draw on familiar patterns of letters to learn the names of the artists or their artwork from the English language. I tried hard to tie this information to some visual examples as I learned to do in middle and high school. For example, it took me forever to learn Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian's name and artwork. There are so many total letters and extra 'a's in this name I gave up on saying the name

aloud. I did however learn to identify her work. Her work has lots of details including angles. Because the letter 'a' is the first letter of the word 'angle' I remember feature of her work.

If I could not figure out how to tie the information to some visual references that I could remember, I had to go back and use the skills I learned about memorization. In the art history class, we had to write a lot of papers. I really struggled to get them all written and to do it well. It took me a lot longer than my classmates to finish each paper. The research and the writing took so much time. It was a requirement of the graduate program to take a lot of hours in art history. I think it is ironic that I have had enough hours that I could teach art history at a university now. I do not know if I ever will, but I could. I prefer not to teach it. I met my wife while I was in graduate school, she teaches some art history. She is better at that kind of stuff than I am.

Something that I was much better at was drawing, of course than art history. I said earlier that I liked to create my own characters and put them into stories. My characters are often childlike in nature. As a graduate student, I started illustrating children's books really heavily. Because I think a bit differently than others, remember the superpower that dyslexia gave me, I am able to share my artwork from a different perspective than may be expected. For my thesis show at the end of my MFA program, I produced an entire gallery full of art, which consisted of a children's story I created of my own characters. The main character dies at the beginning of the story. The character's superpower is that he can share his experiences after his own death with others. The artwork depicts what happened as the character, Mago, experiences the next life. It was a very abstract show. The story was told in a series of landscape photos. I also had a few other pieces of work in the show to demonstrate breathe in addition to the depth of the character story. Here are some images of work from the show.

**Figure 4.8 Painting of Awe**



*Figure 4.8.* This is a of a piece of artwork that Declan created in graduate school. He had the freedom to make the piece as he desired. By Declan, (2017). *Awe*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

**Figure 4.9 Example of Graphic Design: Finesse**



*Figure 4.9.* This image demonstrates the detailed oriented skill needed to be a graphic designer. By Declan, (2017). *Finesse*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

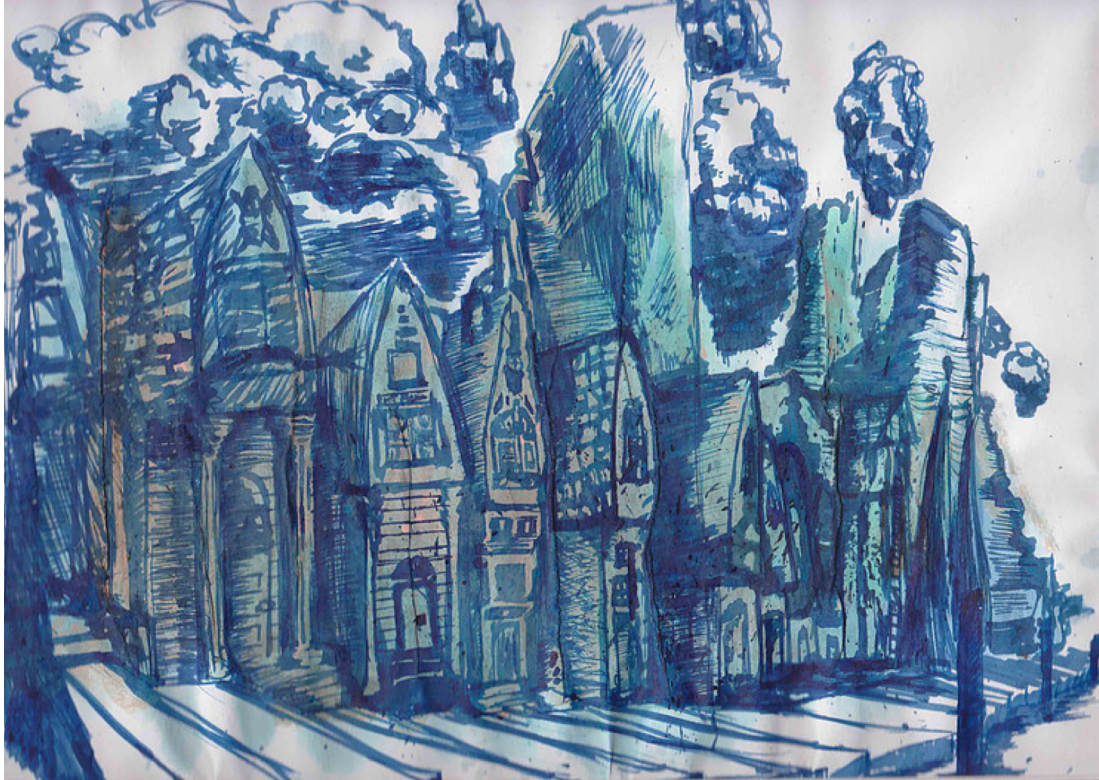
However, I do not always get to tell stories in landscape photos as a graphic designer. Often, when I create a graphic design work, it is for another person or business and they dictate the outcome of the work. Businesses frequently use my work to advertise a service or product. Sometimes I really enjoy the creativity necessary to meet the needs of the business within the constraints that they give me. Within graphic design projects, there are also areas in which I am keenly aware of my disability. For example, if I create a marketing campaign for a barbeque sauce, I can be creative and make a nice label using images and colors. However, I still need to include critical elements such as ingredients and company information. I have to be very conscious of my how I spell words and make sure all of those details are correct. For example, if I put in the wrong web address on the product, this would be a major mistake. This process takes me extra time. I always make sure I have someone else look over my work to avoid misspellings and other mistakes. Graphic design work needs to be perfect. There is much less margin for error compared to other art forms. If I am drawing an ear on the computer and make a mistake, I cannot just erase it. I may have to work with it and make literally 150 changes to the little area with the ear to make it just right. Then I have to put all of the pieces together to get the entire illustration correct. I have pages of noses and ears to get the perfect image. One of the benefits of graphic design is that most of the work is done on the computer. One of the best things for me to learn to use effectively on the computer was spellcheck. I used it religiously with all of my work. All of this work is very detail oriented.

To offset the precision and detail needed for graphic design projects, I can go back to my love of landscapes. But sometimes I get the chance to do landscape-based work, which I really enjoy. When I do landscapes, I get to use many of my art skills. I can combine my graphic design background with oil paints and drawing. There is more freedom in painting and drawing



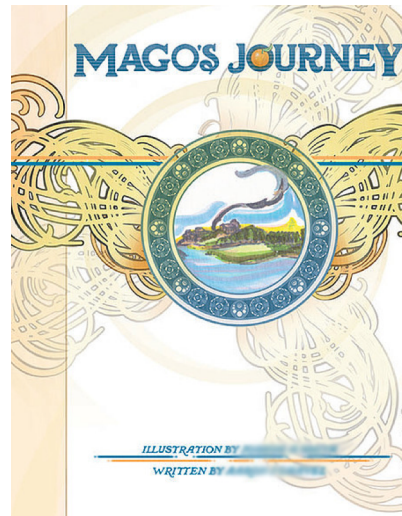
than in graphic design. I am not expressing the needs of a company when I paint. There are limitless opportunities when I am creating a painting or drawing.

**Figure 4.10 Set out, Alone, For the Item Shop: Down the Road**



*Figure 4.10.* This is an example of a piece of artwork that Declan created in graduate school as part of the children's story he created. By Declan, (2017). *Set out, Alone, For the Item Shop: Down the Road.* [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

**Figure 4.11 Mago's Journey Front Cover**

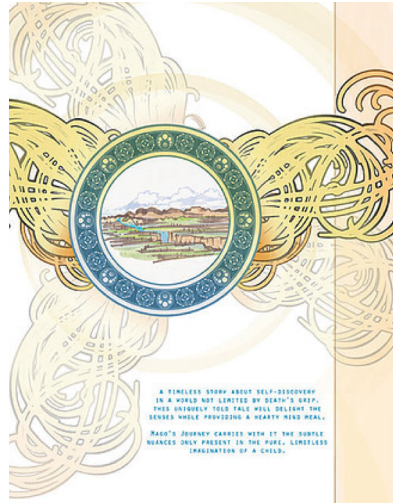


*Figure 4.11.* This is the cover of the children's book that Declan created to accompany his thesis show exhibition. By Declan, (2017). *Mago's Journey Front Cover*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

When I was in graduate school, I created a series of comics that were based on secret agents that were from the perspective of little kids. I enjoyed thinking about things from a child's point of view. Here are the Images of the front and back of the cover comic book. I enjoyed my time in graduate school and creating this character.

I had started to figure out how to work around the dyslexia which was better than when I was a kid. Life had not become easier for me but I knew how to cope with or work around my learning issues. I still use many of the coping skills in my position as an art instructor.

**Figure 4.12 Mago's Journey Back**



*Figure 4.12.* This is the back cover of the children's book that Declan created to accompany his thesis show exhibition. By Declan, (2017). *Mago's Journey Back*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

While I am glad went ahead and got my MFA, I wish I had earned it because I really wanted the degree and I knew what I wanted to do with it went I started. Instead, I started the MFA program because I felt as if I needed to mature and grow before I left school. Having accommodations for my learning disability helped me with some of the difficulties I encountered as a graduate student. But it was still difficult to keep up with the work my fellow graduate students. There were plenty of nights that they went out after working in the studio that I had to stay at school and work. If I could read things correctly and quickly the first time it would have been helpful. I think all of the double-checking of my work also slows me down significantly. Maybe I could have joined my classmates for a few more drinks if I did not have dylsexia. That was not the reality of my situation.

## **Life as an Art Instructor: Current Life**

I am excited that I get to continue working as an artist and using make believe in my work in my current position. Before I finished my MFA, I had started teaching a few courses as an adjunct faculty member at a community college. After a couple of semesters, I finished the MFA and was hired full time to teach graphic design and other two-dimensional art courses. It worked out well to find a full-time job right after graduation.

I enjoy my position for the most part. I am able to focus on my students and help them enter college and settle in. For many of my students, this is the first time they have taken college courses and are adjusting to life away from home or at least in a setting that is different than high school. At the beginning of each semester, I go over the syllabus, expectations, and class policies with my students just like other instructors. Of course, as part of this information I tell all the students about the office of disability services on campus. I encourage anyone with a disability to seek out this office for assistance. I have also started sharing with them that I have dyslexia. I do not want the students to be ashamed of having a disability. I think plenty of the students attending community colleges have disabilities or other learning issues. I want to help them be successful. I have shared some of the techniques I used to be more successful in my classes. I hope it helps the students.

One semester I went through the syllabus as I always do with students on the first day of class. This group of ten mostly freshmen students was livelier than most and asked clarifying questions throughout my syllabus speech. I answered the questions as we went along. Once I shared with the information provided by the office of disability services, I disclosed that I had dyslexia. I went on to share about the positive experiences I had from the office of disability services at my alma mater.

Craig, a student in the back row in a purple shirt who had just graduated from a high school two hours away from campus asked me, “Where is the office on our campus?”

I gave Craig a map of the campus and circled the building he needed to visit. “Go out the front of this building and past the brick building on the left then go down the stairs.”

Kathi, a quiet eighteen-year-old with braids in her hair sitting near the window in the back row asked, “Can I talk to you alone after class?”

I replied, “Yes, that is fine.”

Once we finished the first day of class routines, most of the students moved on to lunch. Kathi stayed behind in her desk near the back of the room. I walked back to her.

As I sat in the desk across from her and said in a causally, “Kathi, what is going on?”

While looking down at the desk embarrassed, Kathi shared, “I have dyslexia too. I am not sure if I will be able to make it here?”

“Kathi, you and I can work together to help you be successful in college. I had similar concerns when I went to college the first time too,” I tried to reassure her.

“I don’t want to speak in front of others and my reading skills are terrible,” she revealed as she played with her fingers nervously.

“Kathi, we can walk to the office of disabilities together right now.” She looked up at me with big brown eyes and nodded. We gathered up our belongings and left the room as Kathi swung her patch covered backpack over her shoulder. Kathi and I talked about the flowers and trees on the campus while we walked to the building that housed the office of disabilities office. We walked through the big wooden door into room 217. Mr. Flores, the director of the office was seated at his desk. Mr. Flores was at least six feet tall and had broad shoulders. He was

shuffling through a pile of paperwork on his messy desk clearly looking for something specific. He paused wrote a quick note and then he looked up and greeted us with a smile.

“Mr. Flores, this is Kathi. She just started here and would like to find out what kind of help our college can provide.”

Mr. Flores said, “Sure. Kathi, do you have time to talk now?”

Kathi responded, “Yes.”

I said, “I think I will leave you two to talk alone. If you need anything from me please contact me. See you in class later this week, Kathi.” I walked away from the room with a smile and went to my office.

I am glad that my struggles have been helpful to someone else. While I do not wish dyslexia on anyone, I want students to understand there are ways to cope and negotiate their path through college. I do not know if I think about my dyslexia consciously everyday anymore, but I am no longer ashamed of it. It is part of me. I have learned to type quickly but if I have to write something by hand it takes me longer and I am more likely to make mistakes. I still flip around the first two letters of words when I handwrite something. I have to learn to double-check all of my writing.

My worries about reading and writing come up in my faculty position. While I am in control most of my time when I am teaching, or working on scholarship, I do not always have a voice in which committees and thus sub committees I am appointed to on campus as part of our service requirements. Each fall most of the committee lists are sent to faculty and we each find out about some of our service requirements. When the list shows up in my mailbox, I get nervous. I have learned to work well with things in my wheelhouse, however, I fear being put on

a committee that focuses on something that I have little or no knowledge about. If this happens, I will figure out how to work around it and do what is necessary but would prefer not to.

Having dyslexia helps me to see the world differently. I see dyslexia as a SUPERPOWER. I think I see things differently than those who are not dyslexic. I have heard that people who are blind use their other senses differently. Like one of their senses is more powerful. Maybe that is what happened to me because of my dyslexia. I would like to think the dyslexia has helped me become a better artist. Maybe it helps me to process images better than other people. I am not sure if it is true but I would like to think so. At least I know that images are very important to me.

Most careers do not require you to process images. Artists and graphic designers incorporate this in almost everything they do. We let the images communicate for us. I currently teach a topography class. Now I see letters as forms. I look at letters as an illustrator and not as a reader. Letters are now illustrations rather than only communication. Calligraphy is a great example, or even cursive writing where you write the letters but they become so much more expressive when they are visually seen. Despite my writing disability, I like calligraphy and cursive because to me they are illustrations. They become something visual. It is fun to write when it is visual and it is not just writing for writing sake. When I think about writing being visual, the letters do not get turned around. Images are my preferred outlet of communication.

Lately, I have been working on a series of thank you cards. My mom always made me write thank you cards to people who gave me gifts. Even though I did not like writing, I had to write cards to everyone that ever gave me a gift. I have turned this into an activity that I enjoy.

Now, I enjoy working on thank you cards. I like expressing my creativity on the cards. Right now, the cards have landscapes on the front of each card.

**Figure 4.13 The Shortest Route by Miles**



*Figure 4.13.* Declan shared this example of one of his current works on a thank you card. By Declan, (2017). *The Shortest Route by Miles*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

This is an example of one of the landscapes that have been working on lately. I incorporate these landscapes on my thank you cards I am currently creating. The cards often show images of the far away landscape. The image shows a calm, cool, happy, and still location. These cards bring to mind calm and happy thoughts. I think it shows what I would like to portray to the world. I put the images on cards to share this feeling and thoughts with others. That seems appropriate for a thank you card. I hope the people that receive the cards feel happy when they get the cards. I enjoy being able to create calm images in my artwork. It makes me feel in control of my emotions. I guess, I have done so for a long time. I like the way my mind works when I am creating a landscape. Landscapes have the power to calm me.



In contrast to landscapes, here is an example of a graphic design project I created. This type of art shows is functional and is in our everyday lives. People probably do not even realize the amount of work an artist does for products they use every day. That is okay you are supposed to want the product, not the artwork in this situation. This makes graphic design different from some of the other types of artwork. It has function just in existing and providing information to a consumer or reader.

**Figure 4.14 Ogre Beer Collection**



*Figure 4.14.* Ogre Beer is a product line that Declan created for a company. It demonstrates an unexpected use of packaging. By Declan, (2017). *Ogre Beer Collection*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

This is a work-related example of a product line that I created for a beer company. As you can see, graphic designers have to take into consideration all types of packaging for a product or a product line. For this example, I had to consider the individual containers as well as

the shipping or protective cases. As you can see, there is a theme of the ogre throughout the packaging without each element being identical, as often happens in advertising. Beer companies, especially small breweries, seem to be becoming more creative and have attention-grabbing product. I really liked working on this project. I pushed this packaging in a nontraditional and challenged the idea of what packaging could look like.

On a more personal note, I like this work but still struggle with it, as I mentioned before. The labels have to have perfect information and that is hard for me to work on this part of the work. I always have to have other people check this part of the work for me before I share it with those that have commissioned the work. Getting this information wrong would be bad. This causes me to get nervous when I have to work through this written part of the artwork. I may not get hired again or they could tell others about my mistakes. Either way this would not be a good situation. But I know that I need to work extra in this area and allow time and plan to have others check the work. It is just one of those things that I have learned to do. It has become a necessary step in my process. I just know I have to plan for it with every project. I do not enjoy writing because of this fact. But it is my reality.

In addition to not enjoying to write, I do not enjoy reading. I do not read much for fun. I still love to listen to storytelling. However, since I am an adult, I do not have a teacher to read to me anymore. So, I have learned to work around this by listening to audio books, podcasts, National Public Radio (NPR), documentaries, and interviews often. I love to listen to people telling me things. I want to ingest the information from a non-reading standpoint. I know that people always say that books are better than the movies. But I do not have that much time to put into reading a book. So, if I want to stay up with popular culture, I just watch the movie. I may

miss out on some of the details, but I get the idea of what others are talking about by just watching the movie.

While I do enjoy watching movies, I also work on my own artwork at home. There is always an easel up in the living room at my house just like when I lived with my parents. I always have multiple paintings in constant development. Every once in a while, I go and throw some paint on the canvas and see what happens. I just wait for the right mood and start working. It seems like the more I work on my art the more I need to work on art. It is addictive. In addition to working on my own work at home, I hit the jackpot and get to continue my art at work. Many artists have to work other full time jobs to pay the bills and their art becomes a hobby. For me, I am living the dream. I love that I get paid to be an artist and share my knowledge and skill with others. Working with art students is great.

Long term, I assume I will continue teaching at this college. My wife is also teaching here so it makes sense for our little family to stay in this community. Being a dual career academic couple make it a bit more difficult to move or go to a different college. We are happy where we currently live and we want to raise our son, Sheldon, here.

We are currently adjusting to life with an infant. So right now, most of the artwork I make is during class as a demonstration for my students. I do not have as much time to work on art at home since my child was born. He is still little so there is not much free time now to work on my artwork for long amounts of time. I do wonder and worry that I have given Sheldon dyslexia. I hope this is not the case. I do not want him to have the difficulties that I had in school. Growing up can be difficult enough without having trouble learning. Sheldon is only a few months old, it will be a few years before I know if he has a learning disability. I will keep my fingers crossed until that time.

## **Josephine's Narrative**

### **I am so different. What is wrong with me?**

Josephine was born in 1957. She attended elementary, junior high, and high school on the West coast. She graduated high school in the spring of 1975 and started college that fall. In addition to having a bachelor's degree in art education, Josephine also has a Master of Art's degree in mixed media sculpture. Later, Josephine obtained her MFA degree in ceramics with an emphasis in sculpture.

She was also willing to share her educational experiences with me. Josephine was excited to have someone interested in her story. Currently, she has a studio at her home in the mountains. She works in the studio most days. Josephine teaches workshops for artists in her studio as well as travels around the United States to share her ceramic talents with students of all ages. She has even attended and taught workshops in Asia within the last year. Josephine is currently in her early sixties. Because Josephine is about 30 years older than Declan, her memories of being a child are not as detailed. Another important thing to note is that when she was in PK-12, the labels for disabilities were not the same as they are now. There were little or no services for people to use when children struggled to learn in school. Josephine's teachers just knew she struggled in school but did little or nothing to help her. There were not services available as there are now to help students with exceptionalities.

## Creative Arts Bag Portrait

**Figure 4.15 Frontstage Josephine**



*Figure 4.15.* Josephine created a Jack-in-the-Box on the front of her creative arts bag portrait. The face is made of clay and is three-dimensional. Photo by N. Day, (2017). *Frontstage Josephine*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

This is the front of my bag portrait. It shows the parts of myself that I am proud and would typically share with others. This piece is a jack in the box coming out of its box. You know a jack-n-the-box. The jack has a pink-footed canary in his hand as the focus of the piece and additional canaries are coming out of the box with him. These birds are a repeated theme in

many of my pieces. I love them. They are my special little creatures. I created them. The pink-footed canaries are always harbingers of good news and joy. The birds on this bag are specifically telling the world that everything is going to be alright. The message that *you learn from the way things are* is evident. The birds let me know that my dyslexia may not be a problem. It is an asset. On the front of the box there is an actual key, they key signifies the box has been opened and the story has been told. Additionally, the cross is a nod to my life as a Christian. Christianity has helped me to get through my life and its problems in a supported manner. So many times, I would have been lost without Christianity in my life.

**Figure 4.16 Backstage Josephine**



*Figure 4.16.* On the back side of the creative arts bag portrait, Josephine created a black and white work that contains words, numbers, and images that she feels represent her backstage. Photo by N. Day, (2017). *Backstage Josephine*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

This side of the bag shows the stuff that I try to hide from others. The back side of the bag is filled with labels. Notice the labels are bursting out of center. I have also included the checker print to symbolize the checkered past that one must go through to have the front side of the bag. I purposely kept it black and white. For me going to school and growing up was black and white. There was no gray. You can get those negative labels and you can keep them or you

can let them burst out and let them go on their way. I try hard to let the negative influences and experiences go away from me. I just try to release them. The scarecrow represents the fact that I was always scared. I was always scared someone would find me out. They would know that I was a phony. I have felt like an imposter in so many situations in my life. This was especially true when I was in school. Letters and numbers can so easily be written backwards to demonstrate this, I added 'mistakes' throughout the back side of the bag. The numbers are also topsy turvy where ever I look. These numbers look just as they often do to me when I read and write.

### **Why is school so hard? –Elementary School**

A few things I remember as I was going to school are that it just an absolutely confusing time for me. They did not understand what was going on with me. I remember going to school as a child and knowing that I was different. But did not understand why I was different. I just saw things differently and it was so hard for me to learn like my classmates. All I knew was that I did not do well with reading and writing. Numbers and letters bounced around the page. I never learned to read the bold captions while reading. I just skip over it. This practice has caused me problems. I could never pick out the main topics of a reading because I just did not see those bold headings. I never knew what I was supposed to be looking for. I always failed those assignments.

Numbers and letters would be turned around when I saw them. Sometimes they bounce when I read. The words bounce around all over the page. It is crazy. It is hard to explain and even harder for others to understand.

I did have success in school when it was time for art class. There were no bouncing letters and numbers when I worked with clay. I remember that when I was in second grade the



art teacher was Ms. Herrman. She was a petite woman that wore an apron full of pencils and markers in it at all times even in the hallway. She was probably in her late twenties. She often had a pencil behind her ear and sometimes a colorful headband or flower holding back her short curly hair. Ms. Herrman often smiled and worked hard to keep everyone on task with each step of the art projects. One day in the spring, she put a ball of clay in front of each child on the table.

“Class, this is clay. We are going to each make an animal with the clay,” Ms. Herrman instructed while waving her hands around as she usually did.

I created a hippopotamus.

Ms. Herrman walked by my table, “Whoa, wow that is really good.”

I looked up at her through my long bangs with interest and responded, “Oh? Really?” I was shocked. I had so much fun making the hippopotamus and it was something a teacher was actually telling me I was good at. I could not believe it. My love of clay was reinforced when my grandfather would take us to the toy store and all I wanted to do was buy Play Doh. I also love playing in the mud.

I struggled so much in elementary school. I wish it had been different. I wish my teachers would have understood that I had dyslexia as soon as I entered school and was supposed to be learning to read. I wish others had known how to help me. I wish I had not thought that I was stupid. Letters and numbers were and still are my enemy. I learned to avoid reading and writing as much as possible. I was stupid and could not keep up with peers each year this became clearer as each year of elementary school. I think that if the teachers and my parents had known about learning disabilities when I was in elementary school, I would have had a much better time in school and in the rest of my life. I want children to get the services that are necessary to help them as soon as a problem is noticed.

## **Striving to Hide My Struggles: Junior and High School**

Junior high and high school were not any easier for me than elementary school. Because it was so long ago, being in junior high and high school sort of blend together. In my mind, there is not much of a difference between the two schools for me. I enjoyed the social parts of junior high and high school. I was a varsity cheerleader and popular in high school. However, learning was not any easier for me. In fact, I was probably more confused about why reading and writing was so hard for me. I knew that I was stupid.

I remember being in junior high and computers were just starting to be in schools. The teacher put me in front of a machine that would switch each line while I was reading it. The line would move up to the next line. I could not keep up with it. This machine brought out my anxieties for the first time that I noticed. School was so hard for me and this experience demonstrated it for me.

I always worked very hard in school. I strived to be number one. My mom said she had never seen anyone work so hard to get through high school. Apparently that is what got me to graduation. I have to always be the best that I can be. No one ever mentioned dyslexia before I went to college. I snuck all the way through high school without a diagnosis of dyslexia<sup>2</sup>. I think that part of why I made it through high school because I was popular. I was a varsity

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<sup>2</sup> Researcher note: Public Law 94-142 also known as The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 was enacted in November of 1975. This Act ensured that all children in PK-12 schools, including those with disabilities, would have access to a free and appropriate education. This act also required due process of law in cases in which students were denied this education. This legislation provided safeguards for parents and children. Before this law, parents did not have a voice to help plan the education of their child with a disability. It is likely that there were not special education services available for Josephine prior the passing of this law. She did not receive any special services to address her dyslexia because the schools were not required to provide her accommodations or modifications to help her overcome her disability.

cheerleader. People wanted to see me be successful. However, high school was awful for me. I struggled so much to learn. I used to use the **big ‘R’ word** to describe myself. I knew I was *retarded*<sup>3</sup>.

One time I was sitting on our white kitchen counter talking to my mom as she did the dishes. My legs were dangling, and I was swinging them harder than normal. Mom usually hated it when I sat on the counter, swinging my legs, but she did not say anything to me this day. I think she knew I was struggling with something. While wearing yellow rubber-dish-washing-gloves that did not necessarily coordinate with her green blouse and jeans, Mom turned to me and asked, “What’s wrong, Josephine?”

I looked down at my dangling, swinging bare feet, trying to avoid eye contact and said, “I’m not sure mom. I know there is something wrong with me. Schoolwork is so hard for me, it always has been for as long as I can remember. I am stupid or something. I am *retarded!*”

Thud! Crack! Plop! Mom dropped the orange plate she had been scrubbing back into the sink sending bubbles around the faucet and looked at me with huge round eyes. While holding back tears she said, “Josephine Helen, you are NOT *RETARDED!*”

“Then what am I then? I don’t know any other words to describe why I cannot learn like everyone else in my grade. I must be *retarded*,” I half shouted through my own tears.

Mom stared at me with teary eyes while removing the yellow gloves, “Josephine, you are not *retarded*. I am sorry you have to work so hard to figure out stuff in school.”

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<sup>3</sup> I am uncomfortable with the use of the word ‘*retarded*’ however, this is a word that Josephine used often to describe herself growing up. Because terms such as learning disabilities or dyslexia were not used around her until she was older, she assumed that she was *retarded*. At the time, Josephine used this word to describe anyone that who had a disability no matter what the issue was.

“But Mom, they sometimes put me in classes with students who are physically handicapped. I have to go to class in that trailer house building behind the main school. But Mom, I do not fit in there either. I do not fit in anywhere at all. What is wrong with me?” I said as I started to sob uncontrollably.

Mom came over and gave me a hug and said with a shaky voice, “You work harder than anyone I have ever seen work in school. You are doing okay. You will make it through.”

We both cried and did not talk about it again.

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The teachers did not know how to help students with disabilities when I was in school. They had not taken any classes about students with dyslexia or other learning issues. The laws had not been passed to provide struggling students with learning or adjusting to school. A few of the teachers tried to help me but it was clear they did not have any help in supporting students. There were no counselors, special education teachers, or school psychologists to help come up with learning plans as they do now. I am glad that this support is there for kids now but I really wished I would have had support. I wish someone would have stepped up before I was in college. I wonder where I would be if that had been the case.

I took as many art classes as I could. I took crafts, woods, and graphic arts classes. In one of these classes during my senior year, we made clay pots. I only sat down at the potter’s wheel one time before high school graduation. It was so hard to figure out. The teacher did not have time to let us actually play with the wheel or to teach us how to use it. But I was intrigued with the wheel from this day on.

The only time I felt happy in high school was when I was cheering at the game or in my art classes. The only special recognitions that I received while in school were art awards. It

seemed funny to get awards for something that was so easy for me to do. I knew that I worked a lot harder at writing papers and completing readings than I did in any of the art classes.

I am not sure if anyone, besides my mother, understood how hard I really worked to score barely passing grades in school. I wish someone would have figured it out and that they would have been able to help me out. I hope that students in high schools now do not have struggle as much as I did. I wish that I would have known that things would get better and that I would be able to be successful in my own way as an adult. I am not sure that this would have taken the misery out of high school for me but it might have helped. I would not go back and do it again. School was a miserable place for me. I had to work hard to understand the most basic information. I did not have help when I needed it. No one knew how to help me or even recognized when I struggled. The best the school came up with was to put me in classes with students with students with multiple handicaps. That still did not help. It just made me feel more isolated and confirmed that I did not fit in anywhere. My days and nights were filled with doubt and dread of the lessons that would be presented the next school day. I just wanted to learn. I understood the importance of learning but no matter what or how hard I tried it would not work. I could not learn. I just wanted to understand something the first time. I wanted to be a good student. I wanted to be average.

### **Undergraduate: Josephine**

After I had such a hard time in high school, I did not think I was smart enough to become an art teacher which is what I had always wanted to do. But I went to college anyway because all of my friends did. I wanted to be normal like all of my friends. I went to a public college in California in the fall of 1975. I started out slowly taking courses. During my freshmen and sophomore years, I only took three credits each semester. In my junior year, I began taking 15

credits. It took me NINE years to finish my bachelor's degree. While I was going to college, I knew that I saw things differently. It is not just that math and writing and reading are difficult for me, it is just that I see things differently. I know I am different and I see the BEAUTY in it and I see the beauty in others. I appreciate it now. I think that other people do not always get you and I think that I will always be very awkward and stand out as unusual in a crowd. I liked that I see things differently but wished it did not make me stand out in a negative way.

As I said, I am so different. I think it is because I am not smart. I knew that I was not smart. I have known this since I started school. At first, the college let me believe that I was not smart enough to become an art teacher. So, I decided that I just wanted to become a potter. I just wanted to throw pots on the potter's wheel. One of my professors encouraged me to do so. I was beginning to fail some of the courses early on and being a potter seemed easy to me. The psychology professor, Dr. King had a dynamic personality that filled the room when he walked in despite his short stature. He was probably in his forties and seemed to be able to analyze us all as we walked into the classroom. The class met in a dimly lit basement classroom with cinder block walls and hard green tile floors. It was a cold classroom until Dr. King walked in and started class each day. One day after a discussion on adolescent development, pulled me aside to talk after class.

Dr. King said, "You are doing alright, you just need to slow down."

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"I think you know the information that I need from you but you are causing yourself problems by becoming so frustrated."

I became defensive and said, "Reading is so hard for me. I am not frustrating myself. Reading does that for me!"

Dr. King understood I had many layers and that the frustration he saw was not only in his class. He gave me his business card and kindly said, "Come by my office tomorrow afternoon. Let's start a conversation about how to help you."

I took the card with my shaking left hand and said, "Thank you."

After continued conversations, Dr. King started to figure out that I had real learning problems. He started to get me help. I had to take a math class and because the dyslexia flips the numbers, it made it difficult to get the correct answers. I had a math teacher who was also helpful. Her name was Dr. Rawson. She was a big woman with wavy black hair who loved to wear patterned dresses. Dr. Rawson was proud of being fifty and told us to always be proud of who we are even if society tells us we should not be proud. I think that maybe she and Dr. King talked about me and my problems. I do not know for sure. I suppose it does not matter because she also figured out that I struggled with learning information in her class. Dr. Rawson also asked me to come to her office one day. She had written it on the top of an assignment that she handed back to me in class. I appreciated that she did not tell me to do so in front of my classmates. Dr. Rawson simply made eye contact with me as she laid the stapled pages on the blue desk. I went to her office later that day. Her office was full of books, a couple of wilted plants, and photos of people that I assumed to be her family.

Dr. Rawson invited me to sit down on a chair near the left right edge of her desk, "Josephine, I am glad you came by to see me. Have a seat."

I sat and looked at her suspiciously asking, "What do you need? Did I do something wrong in class?"

"Are you having trouble in my class?" Dr. Rawson wondered.

I answered shamefully, "Yes. But it is no different than any other class."

Dr. Rawson looked into my sad brown eyes and said, “Tell me what you mean.” I sunk into the back of the hard, cold, and black chair and told her about some of my struggles. I am not sure why I opened up to her like I did. I had never admitted to anyone the things I told her that day.

From that afternoon on for a few semesters, she and I would meet and try to figure out how I could do better in my classes. Dr. Rawson was kind and nodded when she spoke to me in a concerned voice. I always felt more comfortable with her than any other teacher that I had in school. She taught me to slow down and point at each number or letter as I was reading it. I think that my brain was moving too fast and it caused reading and writing to be difficult. Maybe I was freaking out while I did my work. It helped so much to have the support of my professors. They encouraged me to keep going. So, I did.

When I ended up failing an exam or having other difficulties, they would allow me to retake it. I could not pass the English proficiency exam. But after I pointed at each word as the math teacher taught me to do before I submitted my work, I passed. It is crazy to know that I had to have help to pass the English proficiency. I was a grade whore. I would do anything to get an A. I was very driven. I just worked my butt off. I studied all the time. A couple of professors could not believe that I made it through high school without getting a diagnosis of dyslexia. Right away the college saw that my test scores sucked. Eventually, they put me through tests to try and figure out why my SAT and other scores were so low. They also helped me understand that I have test anxiety. Like I said, Dr. Rawson and I continued to meet while I was in school fairly regularly. One day were in her math book filled office, she inquired, “How do you feel when it is time to take an exam?”



I answered, “I am always nervous, my hands are sweaty, and often my heart feels like it is going to pound right out of my chest.”

Dr. Rawson just nodded and stated in matter of fact manner, “That is what I thought you might say” as she handed me a printed green brochure with the word “ANXIETY” across the top of the first page in big bold letters.

She followed up saying, “Take this home and read it. You may find it helpful.”

I listened to her instructions and read the green brochure later that afternoon. She was correct. The description of anxiety was a familiar feeling for me. There were a few tips on the last page about breathing and positive self-talk that helped me some when I remember to use them.

Despite Dr. Rawson’s and Dr. King’s help while in college, it was not all positive. Again, just as in high school, I was placed in remedial classes with physically handicapped students. That is where they found out that I was dyslexic. They also sent me to an eye doctor. The doctor found that I see things a little bit crossed. My eyes do not physically cross but I see things as if they were crossed. This helped explained why words and numbers bounce on a page for me. At the college, they helped me by giving me a special ruler to put under the words to keep the words from bouncing off the page. They also gave me a turquoise sheet to put over the pages to help. However, it never seemed to make much of a difference for me. I did not keep using it. But that ruler helped me out. I still use a similar version of it when I do a lot of reading.

I was thankful for the help that I got when I was getting my undergraduate degree. I felt as if at least a couple of people finally cared about me when they took the time to help me to learn. While it was frustrating to still have to struggle, at least someone helped me to understand

that I had dyslexia and that I was not *retarded*. It is still so hard to not think about myself as retarded after doing so for so long, but I know I am not *retarded*. I tried to tell myself over and over that I was not *retarded* but that is a hard thing to do when there was still so much doubt in my head. It was always there and I had to push the feeling of doubt away to feel most anything else when it came to school. That is unfortunate and I wish it were different even now. I learned a lot about how to work around my dyslexia by focusing on art. Focusing on my strengths and trying to avoid situations in which I needed to read or write a lot seemed to make everything go better. But I still took nine years to get a four-year degree. I still was very isolated while in college. It took me nine years to finish the degree that was supposed to take me four years to complete. I would make a few friends and then they moved on and graduated. This happened over and over. I was hard to make connections with some of the students and faculty because I was not on campus full time as they were. I would have failed class after class if I had tried to be a full-time student as most students did.

### **Out of College: Family and Art**

When I was almost done with my bachelor's degree, a professor talked me into getting my master's degree after graduating. I did not know if I could do it. It took me nine years to finish my bachelor's degree. But I went ahead and got a master's degree in education. It only took me three years, even while I was busy creating a life.

I got married and started raising kids right off the bat. I had only been married a year when I had my first child. My husband and I did craft shows but it was not to sell items made from clay. We put crafts together. When I found out that I could get my hands-on clay everything was better. I was more centered. Eventually, I even started taking those stupid classes in which I would carve a piece of clay and then paint the piece. That was not real art. It

was crafts. It was not what I wanted to be doing but I was getting closer to finding happiness. I just wanted to get my hands in clay. When potters use the potter's wheel it is called throwing. It is necessary for me to get into the "clay mode" to get anything out of the potter's wheel. When I get to spend time in the studio with clay, I call it clay mode. I just need time to work with the clay and decide what to do with it. Depending on the mood I am in, I can either throw or hand build with the clay when I am in clay mode.

During the time, I was a high school art teacher and working on my first master's degree, I also had to teach accelerated reading classes. I was uncomfortable when they told me I was going to have to teach reading to high school students.

Mr. Ross was the high school principal that walked around the building with his perfect posture as if he owned the building. He dressed professionally in his dress pants, dress shirts and solid colored ties. He thought very highly of himself and thought others should too. However, I did not find him to be supportive of most of the teachers. Especially not me. One semester, he came to me in the hallway and told me between classes that I would be teaching a section of accelerated reader next semester. I looked at him shocked.

"Mr. Ross," I said, "I would really prefer not to teach reading."

He replied, "You do not have to really do anything. You just need to babysit the class."

"What? I am not a babysitter or a reading teacher. I was hired to teach art." I replied probably in a snarky manner. So many thoughts started swirling through my head. My knees grew weak. My mind was stuck! I did not want to be a baby sitter! I wanted to teach what I was good at! Art!

"But reading is hard for me." My breathing was fast and I am sure that Mr. Ross noticed. But he said nothing about it.

He added, "Josephine, you will teach reading next semester. I will get you the information. Just make sure the kids stay out of trouble." Mr. Ross walked away with his straight, unbending posture. I could not believe it. He just walked off coldly as if he did not have a care in the world. I was freaking out. My head was still spinning. The next semester I did teach accelerated reading to a classroom full of high school students. I had to read in front of the kids as part of the curriculum and I thought that I was going to die. LITTERALY die. My breathing was out of control. I read so poorly and it took so long for me to read because the words bounced around the page. I had to use that ruler underneath the words that they gave me in college to help the words stay still on the page. How could I possibly teach high school students reading when I still have to use a stupid ruler to help me read for myself? After some deep breaths and much more preparing than was likely necessary, I ended up surviving teaching the students in the accelerated reading class. But I never ever want to do it again. EVER!

I took classes in the summer and then some classes while I was teaching during the year for a Master of Arts degree in mixed media sculpture. I was also the junior class sponsor and doing all of the crazy stuff that that entails. I had to be at every game. I was so busy. There were ups and downs as with anything. I thought that I really wanted to teach at the high school level. But eventually, I started a new program in the elementary school for the arts and I just taught that in half days. I taught at the elementary level for a while, until I was no longer fulfilled from this experience.

After a while of teaching elementary school, I felt like I needed a change from teaching. So, I started a coffee house. I decorated the whole coffee house with my pots and made all of the dishes. I painted the floors and walls. I made feet for the tables to look like real human feet. The whole place had a goofy Alice in Wonderland theme. I really liked creating my own place

that was cool and funky. People enjoyed coming in and getting coffee and hanging out in my shop. It was a great place to spend time. I know I enjoyed spending time there. I did not have to worry about reading in front of students or being assigned work that I was not trained to do. However, eventually I lost my partner in this business. After the coffee shop closed, I went back to teaching at the high school for a couple of years. These images are examples of my work that are similar to the theme of the coffee shop. My thoughts kept being drawn to teaching workshops or working at the college level. However, I knew if I wanted to teach workshops then I would have to earn an MFA. I knew I would not get hired to teach either of these things with just the MA degree I had then. A MFA is required to meet the goal I had now set for myself to become a professional teaching artist.

**Figure 4.17 Teapot Figure 1**



*Figure 4.17.* This teapot with a sly smiling cat is representative of the way Josephine's coffee shop was decorated. The cat is also in a protective vessel to help provide boundaries and protection. By Josephine, (2017). *Teapot Figure 1*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017

**Figure 4.18** Teapot Figure 2



*Figure 4.18.* This teapot with a cat and a bird is representative of the way Josephine's coffee shop was decorated. By Josephine, (2017). *Teapot Figure 2*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

**Figure 4.19 Dirty Rat**



*Figure 4.19. A dirty rat chilling within the safety of a teacup. This piece another example of the way Josephine's coffee shop was decorated. By Josephine, (2017). Dirty Rat. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.*

These images of the teapots and the teacup represent the risks that I feel comfortable taking when I work with clay that I might not elsewhere. No one expects there to be sneaky cats and rats in teacups and pots especially in a public coffee shop. However, I was able to put them there in a funny welcoming way. Each of the animals looks happy with themselves for being where they should not be. Maybe this is how I felt when creating art, especially working with clay. I was doing something I wasn't supposed to do. I was doing something that I was good at. I was good at it without all of the work it took to do other things. Sometimes I would catch myself with that sly smile the first cat has on its face when I was working with clay. Notice that the animals have vessels of protection to help them feel their best. See, the rat is in a mug and



the cats are in the teapots. They still have a bit of protection. I think we all need that protection. I know I do. A bit of safety to retreat to, if necessary, while taking risks. That is how I see my creative work. While working with clay takes a lot of time and practice, I found success after putting in the required practice. This was so abnormal for me. Everything else I did took extra work and time. But art came to me so much easier. I loved this type of challenge. I was happy when doing this type of creative work. I had found a place in which I was not an imposter, the studio.

### **Mastering the MFA most of the time**

When I got my hands on wet clay, I was in heaven! I took three ceramic classes before I decided to take classes full time. Then I started taking two ceramics classes at a time. It was all I wanted to do. I was hooked. I then entered the low residency MFA ceramics program. I had to come to campus at least twice a semester for extended stays. These extended stays typically occurred around midterms and finals. I had to meet with other low residency students, on campus students, and faculty during these visits to campus. This is when we met with our faculty advisors that made up our thesis committees. When I was away from school, I continued the coursework in my home studio to meet the requirements of the program. I made pieces of artwork and fired them in my own kiln. If I had been a full time on campus student, I would have been able to use the school's studios and kilns. I chose to complete the low residency program rather than the on-campus program, so I could stay with my family out of state. This also allowed me to take as much time as I needed to work on my artwork. If I needed additional studio time, I took it. I did not have to schedule my firings and studio times around other students and classes. I have learned that I am much better off at my own pace and on my own schedule.

My artwork has always been sculptural. None of my work was figurative until I started graduate school. Figurative artwork is based on actual figures or real things. Much of my work is based on the human body. Figurative work allows me to share with the audience particular feelings or situations that I want them to imagine. We are likely to connect or react with figures that resemble people or situations that are familiar. I want my work to evoke feelings or create new thoughts or ideas.

**Figure 4.20 Not Ready Yet**



*Figure 4.20.* This figurative piece of artwork represents a woman who is not ready to face the world and she is staying within the protection of a cocoon like structure. By Josephine, (2017). *Not Ready Yet*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

This piece of work is called “Not Ready Yet”, she is beginning to peak out of her protective cover, however, she is still holding on to the sides not ready to step out completely. She is peering out but still protected and safe. She is unwilling to take risks because she knows that others will be better or smarter than she is. I feel like the woman in this piece often especially when I start comparing myself to others around me. I know I shouldn’t do it. But I

have always compared myself to other people. I would look at other people's work and think I could never do work that good. There was another lady in my classes. She always did better than me with her figures. But I knew I could outshine her with my productivity. I am always working. I love the process of making. But it drove me crazy that my artwork would never be better than her artwork. We both did figurative artwork so our work was often compared to each other by others in class. I tried hard to avoid comparing my work with her work but I always did. I wish I could turn off that part of my brain. I wanted to work without fear of comparing my work or falling short of people's expectations. This always happened during critiques. We had to do critiques twice each semester. During critique, we showed our work to the class and professors. Each person told us what they liked about our body of artwork from that semester and what they disliked. It was brutal. No one was worried about feelings or if what was said was hurtful. I hated the critiques. I always wanted to share my work but hearing about my weaknesses and the weaknesses of my work in front of everyone really sucked. I tried to get used to it but I do not think I ever did. I know that I learned from the experience and I understand why artists do critique but it was a brutal way to learn. During on particular critique, we were all standing in the ceramics studio with our artwork from that semester displayed around the room cluttered with potter's wheels, large metal art tables, and shelves full of graduates from the program. It was my turn to share my work. I stepped in front of my work and pointed to the first piece of work.

I said, "As you can see, this woman is sitting in a chair hanging from the clouds. It is a bright sunny day and the pink-footed canaries are flying all around her..." Students nodded in understanding.

Once I had finished talking about the artwork, Geraldine, the student I felt I was always in competition with said, “I like the blue and yellows that you used in the piece. How did you do that? What type of glaze did you use?”

I responded, “I used an underglazing process.” I continued explaining the technique in detail that only another potter would understand.

Geraldine with her curly red hair sticking out from behind a headband that matched her clothes perfectly commented while pointing, “Why is she looking in that direction? I would have her face turned up. It would be more impactful and your audience would get more out of the piece.”

Jerimiah, in his clay dust covered denim apron, pointed out, “I think the fingers on the hand should be holding something besides the arms of the chair.”

Carlton, a loudmouthed student wearing a tie trying to look important also pointed out a flaw in the piece by stating, “There is a bit of an issue with the glaze near her left foot. What happened? Did you intend for it to look like that?” I felt like the criticisms when on and on. While I am sure that there were some good things also said by my peers and professor, I did not hear them. I only heard each of the nitpicky things that each and every student had to say about a piece of artwork that I had been proud of before the critique. Once done with the presentation of my semester’s worth of pieces, I slid to the back of the group with my head down while the focus turned to another artist’s work at the next large metal table. I am not sure if others saw my tears or not. I tried to hide them.

This brutality was in contradiction to what I learned during my first master’s degree. I learned that it is best practice for an educator to be willing to let you experiment without fear. When I could work in my studio away from everyone without fear of being judged for working

too slow or that it took me too many tries to master something was my favorite time. These times for me were a playtime for me. I could express myself without being judged. The art was made just for me. It took me a long time to learn that the art did not have to be about those damned critiques and pleasing other people. I sat and cried through so many critiques. But I loved sharing my work with others so I continued to do them. Once while trying to help me after a rough critique, my Tommy, who was probably about sixteen at the time, reminded me of something.

He said, “Mom, do you remember when I was in your art class? You convinced us that not everyone will like our work. You told the class that the judges either like your work or they do not. You can enter the same piece into different shows and one judge will like it and the next one will not. Not everyone will ‘get’ your work. That is okay.”

I nodded and gave Tommy a hug and said, “You are right. I was right. Thank you for reminding me.” Out of this conversation I concluded that I think educators need to not put us in a box. They need to help create fearless people that are willing to try things they may not be entirely comfortable without crushing our souls.

My MFA was very painful. I even wondered if I would even like my major professor once the degree was completed. I feel like I was duped into going into the program. I asked about the number of papers that needed to be written throughout the program. A professor told me I would not need to write a paper, I would just make a catalog for my thesis show. What I later discovered after I was in the program, was that there were many papers in the art history classes and I had to write papers each semester in each of the ceramics classes about my progress and growth. I also had to write art history papers in the ceramics classes. I actually wrote over a hundred pages a semester. Every semester this volume of writing happened. I had never written

so much. I just ended up writing the papers for myself and not the professor. I would not have made it through if I had done it any other way. I wrote papers about what I wanted to know and they may not have necessarily followed the professors' intended direction. This practice made it more motivating for me. I have a large vocabulary so I used it to my advantage to try to cover my weaknesses with writing. I am not sure if I would have attended the program if I had gotten an honest answer when I asked the question about how much writing I would have to do. It was true that I did not have to write a paper for my thesis show. But there was so much other writing throughout the program that no one mentioned. In the end, I did write a children's book as part of my thesis show. This was an extra thing that I did for myself. I even had it published. My sculptures are superimposed on a photographic background. It was a fun challenge for me. I had the books available at the opening reception for my show. I found it to be a nice addition to my show. All of my work is narrative and tells a story. The book just adds to the narrative. It let the viewer in on a bit more of the story I was trying to tell with my artwork.

I spent most of my time throughout graduate school in a thither. I felt bad for the other students that had to work or be graduate assistants throughout the program. Sometimes I felt like they were upset with me because all I had to do was make art.

Once while I was on campus for a mid-semester visit, another student, Amanda a twenty-three-year-old blonde, who tended to be talkative, who was also a graduate teacher assistant, made a comment to me after a particularly unpleasant critique, "Well, you are so lucky. You get to go home and just work on new work. I have to create new work AND teach classes on campus. Not to mention you have your own kiln and I have schedule my firing around a bunch of undergraduates. Ugh!"

I looked at her shocked. I could not believe she said this to me. I have never had it easy. I just said, “Oh, I guess.”

What Amanda did not see is that if I had to write a paper, I got up that morning and started writing. I could not switch from doing something else and then write. I either need to spend the day writing or spend the day in the studio. I could not do both. I had to have my head in the right place to be able to write. But this is how I create a lot of work. I put my head down and do it. I minimize the distractions and just make art.

Of course, there is reading in ceramics. I could not just play with clay. I had to mix glazes. This requires knowing the chemicals, the reactions, and the amounts of each ingredient to use. I would stop and make a picture to make sure that I got all of the fractions in the right amount. Sometimes I would confuse myself with grams. But thank goodness, I have always been good at using fractions. That was a blessing when mixing glazes. Mixing them wrong could have been a catastrophe for my work. The glazes may not stay on the piece. They may not be the intended color. If I mixed a nontoxic glaze with a toxic glaze the piece was now toxic and could no longer be used with food. There were so many things that could go wrong if I had mixed the chemicals that made the glazes wrong. I had to pay special attention to avoid mistakes.

I did have additional support for my disability while in my MFA program. I was allowed extra time to complete exams. I was also able to have a scribe if I needed one. I also had a great friend, Gina, who edited every single paper I ever wrote, before I submitted the paper to the professor. Gina has been my friend since I moved to the mountains. She and I had children about the same age and we ended up spending plenty of time together while our kids in activities. Gina and I bonded over school concerts and soccer games. We started hanging out more and

more. She was a kind woman about my age who always wore jeans, cute tops, with matching jewelry even when we were on the soccer field. She was very organized and her kids always had healthy snacks to eat between the games. I later found out she had been an English major in college. At a concert for one of our children, I mentioned, "I have a paper to get write this week for school."

Gina responded, "Josephine, I love editing papers. I even worked in the writing center while I was in college. Let me edit your paper before you submit it to your professor."

"Are you sure?" I questioned.

"Yes, it would be my pleasure. Just send it to me a couple of days before you need to turn it in." instructed Gina.

"Thank you." I said, as I gave her a squeeze on the shoulder.

With the help from Gina and the services from the office of disability services graduate school was a bit more manageable. In addition to my struggles with writing, knowing that a test was timed caused me such anxiety. However, having extended time did ease my anxiety some. Because I was a low residence student, most of my exams were done online through Blackboard. The fact that I was using technology instead of just handing my test to the professor, it caused me to be nervous. Blackboard always worked for me but there was always a fear that it would not during a critical time. I do not think I could have made it through the program without documenting my disability and receiving services from the office of disabilities. It would have frustrated me too much to not have support.

It is obvious that my learning problems did not go away or even become too much easier to work with as I finished this degree. By this time in my life, I knew the things that I needed to allow additional time to complete. I knew when I needed work to be proofread by my friend.



Having a disability is not easy at any age. Now I have just learned to cope with it and try to make the best of the situation. I try to be positive and not let the frustrations get to me. Graduate school is frustrating for most people. It is more frustrating for those of us with disabilities. I was in my fifties when I was in graduate school and I still felt as if my disability kept me behind the others.

### **Current Life Happenings**

In a typical day, I head out to the studio in the morning and start working. I am a ceramic artist. I create figurative work. As in graduate school, all of my figures tell a story, so it is very narrative work. I tell a story with each of my pieces. The pieces are often involved in a fantasy world or a dream state. All of the work is intended to take you somewhere. It is like a daydream. You can go there without having to get in a vehicle. Your chair becomes your vehicle.

I glaze all or some of my pieces and sections of other pieces. I often use both underglaze and paints to get the intended look for my pieces. I do not use glaze in the sense that other ceramists typically use glaze. The underglaze helps my pieces to be bright and perky. Then I add paint as necessary to finish the piece. These are techniques I learned during graduate school to give me the intended outcome on my pieces.

**Figure 4.21 Pink-Footed Canaries**



*Figure 4.21.* This is another figurative piece of artwork in which Josephine has included a woman in a box and pink-footed canaries. By Josephine, (2017). *Pink-Footed Canaries*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

For example, look at the colors I used in this piece. The piece of artwork is about protecting what is precious inside. Many of my pieces have boxes in them. I like the symbolism of having an inside and an outside. I also have a thing about being stuck in a box. People can try to trap you in a box but there are things that you want to let go and there are things you want to keep sacred. The things that you want to keep sacred need to stay inside the box. Inside of this piece there are also birds. These are special birds. They are pink-footed canaries. Pink-footed canaries are an endangered species. Obviously, these are special birds as I have mentioned before. They have little people feet with painted toe nails. Each bird has a kind whimsical expression on their face. In this piece, the pink-footed canaries represent the stories that she wants to keep safe inside of this tree to protect them from the outside. This piece also *lights up from the inside when it is plugged in*. The light illuminates the happy stories of the birds. This

piece is also topped with a propeller. However, on top of this one are more pink-footed canaries. These canaries are ready to fly and send out messages. They are harbingers of joy. She is willing to let these birds go free. Notice that she also has her arms and legs outside of the box. She is willing to share those with the world. She also has a book for a neck to signify that there is more to her story.

This piece, *Shadow of the Steeple*, is all about judgment. All of the people are pointing the fingers and there is one person that is saying that it is okay to come in. It is a narrative about churches. Churches are supposed to be inviting everyone in and as you can see most of the

**Figure 4.22 Shadow of the Steeple**



*Figure 4.22.* This piece of artwork represents how some churches cast judgement on people rather than helping others. By Josephine, (2017). *Shadow of the Steeple*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

fingers are pointing out and are unwelcoming. People are often ostracized for what they look like on the outside. No one has a clue what is really on the inside of others. On the inside of the box, there is a song that is written in chalk on black that describes judgment of the church. On top of the piece is a head. The head is of a judge. Notice that she is holding open the door as if she is saying you can come in. Also notice, her neck is made up of two books. One is the book of life and the other is the Bible. She also has a propeller made of hands on her head. Hands are important in this piece of artwork. Hands create, judge, and point at different directions. These particular hands are intended to propel her to have good judgment instead of bad. Notice that there are also keys, locks, and knobs. The piece is meant to be partially open and partially closed. When the cord is plugged in, the song written on the back wall is better seen through the bedsprings. This is an example of my work.

I am all about the process and the actual making. I am a maker. There is a drive or a force to just make art. There are only a few pieces that end up being complicated for me to do. Those I just have to get over quickly. I want the pieces to come to me easily and to tell their story. While I am making a piece of art, I am creating a story. The story evolves and continues until the piece is out of the kiln. I have no trouble selling my work. I feel blessed if someone wants one of my pieces in their home. I want someone else to love the piece. I love making work that is up for adoption. There are only a few pieces that I bring into my house. I only live with a few of my own pieces. However, I love to incorporate other's work into my daily life. I love to trade work. I love owning and using other's artwork. I love holding a mug that a friend made much more than I want to hold one of my own creations. I love the reciprocity of trading artwork.

Because making artwork is my passion, since I have finished my MFA, I still work in the studio each day. I also teach workshops. I especially encourage teachers to take my workshops. Teachers give of themselves every day with little in return. Teachers need something to feel. They need to take once in a while. This is one of the reasons I love teaching teachers. I am able to add something to their tank to give back. I know my teaching can be a harbinger with a hopeful message. I love that this goes out to touch the lives of others. There are lots of birds in my artwork. I do this because I believe that birds are meant to be harbingers of messages and spreading the word that there is good in the world. This way of thinking helps me to be very mindful when I am working with others. As you know, I love sharing my knowledge and I get so much in return. I am not asking for anything from my students besides interest in what we are working on. But what comes back to me is a blessing. It is a gift to me.

I try to teach workshop participants to capture emotions in clay. For example, in one workshop I told the students, “Think about what fear looks like. How would you depict fear so that others can see it?”

One of the students -- Kevin, he is an art teacher from Denver, comes to class with torn jeans, and wears his clay splattered smock, said, “I could give the figure big shocked eyes and put sharp lines from the figure’s head to demonstrate fear.”

“Yes, Kevin, this would probably work to show that your figure was scared or upset.” I responded.

I followed up with, “What does anger look like? Does your hair fly in circles to let others know about your current emotion? Only you know what your emotions look like because you are the one that feels them. The challenge is conveying that to others.”

Another student, Elodie, she is a high school art teacher in a nearby district who makes small colorful ocean scenes in her artwork, shared, “I have used colors to help people know how the figure is feeling. For example, bright cheery colors help me to demonstrate happiness while I have used dark brown and blacks to show fear or depression.”

“Exactly, Elodie. This is what I am talking about. Colors and symbols can help us express to the viewer the feelings of the artwork.”

Trying to convey feelings through my artwork is cathartic for me. I create so much work in this manner to explain my feelings. Because of the concentration needed to complete my work, my work tends to be isolating. So, I build a fantasy world inside of that isolation. I think it intrigues people. I love to get all the questions a lot of other artists do not like getting. I do not want to lead the person somewhere when I answer, I want them to lead me and then I will share the story. I will not tell the story unless someone asks.

I plan to keep teaching my workshops. Sometimes I visit universities and at other times I have workshops in my studio. When I have to grade, it is not even a chore. I have set the guidelines in the syllabus and the participants have either met the expectations or they have not. It is pretty cut and dry. Besides most of the people that enroll in workshops are very motivated to be there. They chose to take the workshop. It is not as if it was forced on them. I do not have issues that I did when I taught high school with the students that did not want to be there on a daily basis.

Even though I am doing the work that I want to for the most part, I still have anxiety. You can probably hear it in my voice now. I have never been diagnosed with it officially, but I know. I have all of the symptoms. It all started with reading and being so scared to make

mistakes when I was reading it caused me to be anxious. When I was in my undergraduate program, they talked to me about test anxiety. It is a real thing with real consequences.

Right now, even after all of this time, I can see my disability as a blessing. I know see things differently. It is actually a form of my creativity. Although, I do not think that my brain is creative. I think that I have the ability to mess things up or skew them or make them not real. Dyslexia has changed how I think about myself and how to overcome my shortcomings. I do not think that I am the most talented person. I think that I have had to work for it all and always have. This is probably why I have to make so much work. It is because I had to work for everything more than others. My skills are not innate. I have seen others who have innate skills as an artist. This is not me. I think everyone has creativity in them that they can unlock if they try and work hard enough. I hate to admit that I cannot even draw a straight line. But I do not need to know how to draw a straight line that is what a ruler is made for. I cannot draw a circle. I do not need to know how to draw a circle. I use a compass every time I need to draw a circle. These are things I have learned to accept about myself and how to overcome my shortcomings to continue this work.

When I create something I usually avoid thinking about how I would depict it in words or verbally. This process is so hard for me that it makes my head spin. So, I just depict a spinning head in a visual format rather than use words. I have put a top on a head before to show this in other work. I have also used propellers. I use a lot of propellers in my work. It also may be because I also have a disease called Meniere's disease. It causes me to have severe vertigo when it is active. Thank goodness it has not been very active in the last ten years but when it is my head feels like it is spinning. This has shown up in my artwork many times.

To add character, I collect objects to use in my work. Not everything that I make is ceramic. There are lots of other objects that are part of the sculpture. For example, I collect wheels, chairs, wings, and boxes. My first thesis show had an excess baggage theme. The baggage became a vehicle for change and getting unstuck. I collected suitcases for that show. Now I am collecting boxes and propellers. I never know when I will need one for a piece. It is nice to have extra objects around in case I need them for a piece.

As I said, the box is huge for me. I have always liked using boxes in my artwork. Even in my teaching, boxes are important. I have always wanted students to think outside of the box. I want them to stop staying where it is safe and comfortable. I want to be able to move outside of my comfort zone and to help others to do so also.

**Figure 4.23 Kingdom Come**



*Figure 4.23. Josephine uses boxes and figures of people to convey information she shares and keep private. Many of the pieces, such as Kingdom Come, have doors that can keep information private from some and share it with others deemed safe. By Josephine, (2017). Kingdom Come. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.*



After these conversations for this research, it makes me think that I should have gone into a career that combined special education and art. I am not sure what that would look like. I guess you are doing it now. I do know that if I had a chance to do it all again without having dyslexia, I probably would get rid of it. Dyslexia has boxed me in. I think it has made me doubt my abilities. I mean I can see that there have been a lot of blessings that have come from it because I see things differently. A lot of my artwork has come as a reaction to my shortcomings mostly from the disability or the doubt that it causes me to have. Having a disability has made life a lot more difficult. Dyslexia has given me excess baggage to carry throughout my entire life. I would love to be able to read a book or do math without struggling. Because my disability is invisible and I do not tell others about it often people may think that I have it easy. Nothing could be further from the truth. I work hard and fight for everything I have accomplished. It is crazy to even think about the possibilities of not having dyslexia. Who knows what I could have done with my life? I do know that when everything is going well, I am supported, and feel good about life, I am like that piece of art, and I am lit up when I am plugged in. Good things happen. In those moments, I just sit back, try to take it in, and smile.

### **I Have Plans**

Someday I may want to work at a university. But for now, I need to create. Teaching workshops give me the best avenue to create. Workshops are nice because everyone that takes a workshop wants to be there unlike when I teach in a college setting full time. If I am not creating my brain gets full. Creating helps me to keep things in balance. For now, I would like to travel to universities and teach workshops. My favorite people to teach are teachers. I love teaching teachers. It is the best experience. Every year, I present at the state art educators

conference. It is a large gathering of educators all interested in art, especially those interested in ceramics and sculpture. My preference is to teach a week-long workshop rather than only four hours. My work tends to be very intricate and I need the extra time. Teachers are so hungry for the information. There is so much freedom teaching those that are so eager to learn. It is a blast! I love it!

I loved teaching high school but they put students in my class that did not want to take art. I do not mind working with those that are interested but lack talent. But talking to someone about my passion and them not being interested was and is painful. I wanted the students to be hungry for what I was sharing. I had a hard time with this situation especially when it happened every day. I hated teaching those that had no interest to learn. Now I prefer to teach those that are hungry to learn. I do not want to convince people to learn to love clay. I want to teach people that already love it or are at least open to working with it.

## **Discussion: Cross-Case Comparison**

### **Introduction**

In this section of the chapter, I present information comparing and contrasting the experiences that Declan and Josephine chose to share about navigating their paths through educational settings. Summaries of the details provided in previous sections of this chapter are highlighted to focus on broad patterns in the narratives of the participants in this study. These broad thematic patterns include: excess baggage, boxed in, *lights up when plugged in*, agency, and superpower. Each of these thematic patterns is elaborated below with comparative elements from Declan and Josephine's narratives.

## **Excess Baggage**

Baggage, in this study, refers to the several bags, suitcases, and boxes that the participants shared containing both their memories of being a person with a learning disability and the ways in which these memories had a traumatic imprint on their identity development. The excess part of the baggage refers to the additional work that they had to do to navigate otherwise unfriendly learning environments, which eventually became their coping mechanisms. Together, excess baggage refers to both the imprint of the traumatic experiences that the participants carry with them until the current point in their lives and the extra navigational and coping strategies that they have built thus far. For both the participants, the pain from these imprinted experiences still linger and can be triggered if they encounter similar experiences, for which they were initially unprepared to activate their coping mechanisms beforehand.

Declan has pain points or baggage that he has carried because of having a language-based learning disability. For Declan, the baggage that he carried were the painful memories of reading aloud, not being to express himself as he intended, being made fun of because he could not perform as other students or communicate as effectively, and experiences of being bullied. The excess baggage, or the excess work to navigate and neutralize these barriers for Declan were drawing, painting and creating images. He began to master these skills to compensate for his lack of being able to read aloud and writing on the same level as his peers. Declan's strength was using the visual arts, which he discovered when he was in elementary school and carried it through to his current day profession as a graphic designer and art instructor.

Declan was always able to use his artwork to express his feelings and show the viewer critical information rather than give independent speeches. He obviously continued this process into his bachelor's and master's degree by becoming a graphic designer. Declan soon

understood it was necessary to manage his doubts and anxieties about his disability by using his advanced visual skills. This was a successful coping mechanism but it was extra work for him, which was also part of his baggage.

Of course, his excess baggage affects his personal life also. There are plenty of deadlines and attention to detail that must be addressed at home too. While Declan has learned to cope with this excess baggage for the most part, he must do extra work and take additional time to make sure his responsibilities are taken care of and that his disability did not get in the way while he was writing or recording information. As discussed, the back of Declan's bag is an image of himself holding the backstage together. He depicts himself working hard physically and mentally to make sure all of the details, in this case wood and nails, are all in the correct place and do not move. This depiction of himself as holding everything in place with great effort is reflective of him managing excess baggage in his life.

**Figure 4.24 Close Up of the Genie's Bottle**



*Figure 4.24. This is an image of the genie's bottle that Declan had his landscape on the front of his bag come escape. Image by N. Day (2017). Close Up of the Genie's Bottle. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.*

Declan's excess baggage also included having to pretend that everything was okay. He went to great lengths trying to fit in and not let others know that he had a disability. On the front of his bag, the calm and serene landscape that he is portraying to the world is coming from a genie's bottle. He knows the perfect life is a dream or wish that he must work hard to achieve. This work manifests itself in planning, practice, double checking to avoiding triggers when possible. Declan felt that he had to fit in, he concealed his excessive baggage as much as possible from others.

Some of Josephine's excess baggage was similar to that of Declan. However, because special education laws and mandates were not in place across the country until November 1975 and she did not receive the special education services in school that Declan benefited from during most of his education. Without minimalizing Declan's struggles and experiences, Josephine's excess baggage has likely been heavier than Declan's due to lack of support for her disability prior to attending college.

In addition to struggling with reading and writing, Josephine was also often ashamed and knew she did not fit in with her peers academically. There was so much excess baggage involving her doubt in her intelligence that she assumed she was *retarded*. This is a major piece of excess baggage to carry around for life. In contrast to her academic abilities, socially she was able to fit in with her classmates. Josephine was popular and a varsity cheerleader. While she enjoyed this part of growing up, it made her doubt her academic skills even more so. She struggled to figure out why she could fit in with her peers socially but not academically. Because she fit in with same age peers socially, she heard her friends and other cheerleaders discuss their concerns about assignments, projects, and teachers. The concerns of the typical teenager became

triggers for her. Josephine's experiences did not match those of her peers her concerns were much more significant. In order to blend in with the crowd, Josephine did not discuss her academic difficulties. She shut down. She found herself nodding and agreeing with her friends pretending that their concerns at school were the same as her concerns. However, of course this was not true. Josephine's concerns were significantly more that of a typical K-12 student. This has created lifelong excess baggage for Josephine to deal with

Josephine expressed high levels of doubt in her life. She doubted her ability to fit in and achieve in almost every educational setting she encountered. She had imposter syndrome that was punctuated by her dyslexia. Doubts about herself became clear when she divulged that she thought of herself as *retarded*. There was so much shame, doubt, and embarrassment in her voice when she shared her self-diagnosis during an interview. It was chilling. The negative thoughts she had about herself were so much more negative than necessary. She truly believed that she was *retarded* when she was growing up. While she did have learning issues, she was far from being classified as being *retarded* according to the criteria that would have been used under IDEIA regulations. Because of lack of understanding about disabilities in the 1970's, she assumed the worst. Unfortunately, it is apparent that she still carries this view of herself being stupid and/or *retarded* in 2017 at times, despite having an overwhelming amount of information to the contrary, such as earning two graduate degrees and being a successful businesswoman. Perceiving herself as *retarded* is still very much a part of Josephine's identity despite credible evidence to the contrary, such as teaching adults in workshops and college students. She disclosed that she knows she is not *retarded*, however, she mentioned it so many times in the interviews that it was obvious that she had lingering doubts about her intelligence.

As a child, both Declan and Josephine had to figure out what it meant to have a disability on their own. Neither Josephine nor Declan had counseling or help from a psychologist to help them develop a better understanding of their learning issues that caused excess baggage. They knew they had difficulty in school but could not articulate their issues with their teachers or parents. Doubts started creeping into Declan's and Josephine's mind because they knew something was wrong with them but could not figure out what to do to help themselves. They naturally just doubted themselves and assumed there was something wrong with them. As Josephine and Declan moved further in their educational careers the doubts remained. However, they both came up with ways to cope with them. Declan tended to rely more on institutionalized help, such as IEPS and a 504 plan and the help of classmates because this help was offered to him at an early age. Josephine found committing extra time to be helpful for her to better complete tasks. She took classes at a slower rate. She was a part time student as she earned her bachelor's degree in nine years. Josephine continued the practice of taking time when she earned her MFA degree, by participating in the low residency program. She did not work elsewhere or complete her studio work on campus. This allowed her to work in her own studio, away from others, so she could keep her own schedule. She could spend an almost unlimited amount of time creating artwork and writing papers because she minimized other responsibilities that other graduate students often have to deal with while taking classes. She isolated herself to allow extra time to create her artwork, fire clay, reading, and writing. Isolation also minimized the time she spent comparing herself to other students and ceramicists. The isolation also protected her from the triggers of the classroom that were caused by her excess baggage of having a language-based learning disability.

Despite having a disability Josephine and Declan were able to negotiate their own path through K-12 and higher education to finally earn a terminal MFA degree. A graduate degree is badge of honor that has opened doors for each of them. Both Josephine and Declan are proud of their accomplishments. However, it would be a challenge for anyone who has not been in Josephine and Declan's position to understand the amount of additional work it took for them to complete their degrees even while dealing with their excess baggage. Declan and Josephine developed their identities around their dyslexia. There is no way to separate their language-based learning disability from their personality, accomplishments, feelings, thoughts, and perception of the world at this point in their lives. Each of them experienced a similar path, having dyslexia and earning an MFA, in different and extraordinary ways. The work and effort that Declan and Josephine have done to reach their goal of obtaining terminal degrees was to help cope with and hide the excess baggage that will be with them for the rest of their lives.

While the participants are aware that they had to do extra work to compensate for having a disability, Declan and Josephine may not even realize the amount of excess baggage he has to carry compared to others. Each of them has no idea what it is like to not have a disability. They may not be completely aware of the level of work necessary to be successful, until they face a situation that triggers them. They have become keenly aware of their weaknesses and the amount of work it takes to cover for what they consider to be weaknesses. The doubts about their capabilities still exist for Josephine and Declan today, as those childhood imprints have been powerful and permanent.

So, it seems that while both Declan and Josephine had painful experiences in their learning environments to the point where otherwise intelligent, capable human beings thought they were stupid, both of them found an escape from public embarrassment for not being able to



perform like others, by focusing on their strengths. Both of them are talented artists who have created positive possibilities for themselves despite the excess baggage, or perhaps because of the excess they had to carry. Declan experienced success in his current profession as a graphic design instructor and Josephine, despite the several writing-based art courses that she had to take, in addition to other difficult learning experiences, creates art that is surrealistic, and escapist in nature. The protagonist in Josephine's art is continuously crossing boundaries, breaking norms, being imaginative, and often belongs to this world and another world of fantasy. Decades of carrying this excess baggage ended up offering Josephine and Declan hours of practice that involved developing an expertise in the set of coping mechanisms they identified for themselves. The ways in which their coping mechanisms manifested in their work are also the ways in which they could offer themselves the dignity they deserved that sometimes they did not receive from their learning environments.

### **Boxed In**

Because this study had several narratives elicited by bags, boxes, and suitcases shared by the participants and their artwork, boxed in refers to person being restricted by boundaries, being closed in by walls, or not being able to interact outside of the boundaries set by others. Boxed in is a barrier to growth in development. In contrast to the trials of excess baggage experienced by Josephine and Declan, being boxed in also provided benefits. For example, on one hand boxed in experiences could include being labeled in ways that Othered and isolated Josephine and Declan. Yet this Othering also caused them to carve a space for themselves, with walls around them that isolated them from people who mocked them or environments that were not friendly towards them. In this manner, the isolation that came with being boxed in, also offered some opportunities to withdraw from the unsafe environments and create their own safe environments.

In cases of being boxed in that are not due to self-preservation, someone may be boxed in as a result of being forced or pushed into a box because it is perceived as being dangerous to move away from those boundaries. When the outside world sees people, such as Declan and Josephine, as being boxed in it often results in outsiders assuming that they are only able to offer a limited amount to situations, interactions, or tasks. Recall Goffman's (1959) theory discussed in chapter three, the 'frontstage' is part of a theory that describe the favorable impressions or public impressions that people try to create using their actions, clothing, and skills. Goffman (1959) continues by describing a person's 'backstage' as the private parts of a person's life, things that many keep to themselves. Being boxed in is part of the backstage material that Josephine and Declan have to deal with because of their overwhelming doubts and fears caused by their language-based learning disabilities. They try to only let outsiders see what society expects from them. They try to hide their disability to avoid judgement from others. In this study, both Declan and Josephine have boxed themselves in to keep their backstage hidden from others as much as possible. The term boxed in is a term used by Josephine multiple times during the interviews to describe herself and her artwork. Declan and Josephine conveyed that they could not always express themselves clearly due to dyslexia, thus, figuratively putting them in a box or being boxed in.

As his bag portrait conveys with a beautifully drawn landscape, Declan prefers that everyone sees him as a calm person that has everything together. However, the truth is that he does not have it all together. He has to work hard to make sure everything works out in the intended manner. While this might be true for many of us, more effort is needed for Declan to do so because he has to do it with a learning disability. He engages in several forms of checks and balances to make sure what he writes, reads, and/or says is correct. In the time that it takes

for this double checking to take place, Declan often experiences isolation from friends and preferred activities, thus, boxing him in. The isolation and the extra work caused by the disability are represented on the back of his bag portrait. On the back of the bag, Declan drew himself as if he was literally on the backstage of his life holding all of the pieces together. He drew missing nails, broken boards, and all of the pieces it takes to put his life on stage in a presentable manner. The bag is a powerfully descriptive image of the isolation necessary for Declan to present the person he is wants others to see. See image on the next page.

**Figure 4.25 Trying to Keep It Together**



*Figure 4.25. Declan drew himself holding the pieces of the backstage together while hiding under a hoodie. Image by N. Day (2017). Trying to Keep It Together. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.*

Declan also felt that he matured more slowly than his peers. He chose to stay at his college to attend the MFA degree to allow himself more time to grow personally and feel more comfortable with his strengths and weaknesses and allow his identity to develop. His weakness, perceived or not, boxed him. Declan may not have had to take this step to allow him additional time to grow personally, if he had not had a disability. Maybe if he had still decided to obtain the MFA in graphic design it would have likely been for different reasons. Maybe he would not have needed additional time to mature and become comfortable with himself.

Josephine boxed herself in employing a different manner than Declan. Her doubts continued to grow so she structured her world to include a large amount of isolation. In an attempt to learn at her own pace and keep others from knowing she had a disability that she did not necessarily understand, she boxed herself in. She felt as if she had to keep herself removed to prevent her peers from figuring out that she has a learning disability. As time progressed,

Josephine became more and more isolated because of the extra time it took for her to complete her reading and writing assignments. This may have contributed to taking nine years for her to complete her bachelor's degree. Then in graduate school, Josephine worked by herself most of the time despite being in classes where students could have worked and learned together.

Working alone became such a habit that she conducts her current studio work in isolation too. It is only when she is teaching or delivering a workshop that she works with people.

Josephine may have also used isolation as a way to control her anxiety. Josephine boxed herself in as protection. She frequently discussed how isolated she felt with her peers in school. Often her anxiety stemmed from not being able to complete tasks in school in a similar manner as her peers. Because she lacked support from her teachers before attending college, her anxiety built. She did not understand why she could not learn like others. She assumed the worst about her disability and it hurt her self-esteem. To avoid feeling out of place or letting others know of her weaknesses, she isolated herself to avoid additional anxiety. Having an undocumented learning disability during a critical period of development, perhaps she became more introverted than she would have been otherwise. She loves the solitude of working with clay in her studio with few interaction from others.

The back of Josephine's bag portrait also portrays her being boxed in. From the negative tone of the words she used to describe herself to the images with downcast eyes, it is clear she is afraid to share her disability with outsiders in and attempt to avoid rejection or other unknown repercussions. These images represent how she feels about herself and how she boxed herself into a label and a disability. Please note that the label of *retarded* that she often used for herself is much more punishing than the more fitting label of language-based learning disability.

The invisible nature of a language-based learning disability and the need that each person felt to hide their disability, kept Josephine and Declan boxed in. Without this study or another close relationship most people would likely not know of either participant's learning disability. It is likely that most people who interact with Declan and Josephine assume they have all average abilities and expect them to behave as so. In order to protect themselves from disappointing others, Josephine and Declan worked hard and created a protective box for themselves. Whether or not, the box was healthy, was not their concern, but all they wanted was that the box would be protective for their self-preservation. As excessive doubts about self-worth and capability became an issue through multiple events in their lives, Josephine and Declan often felt as if they were not good enough. They thought about giving up on themselves, on projects, on classes, on school often. But rather than give up, they worked harder. Their hard work often ended up isolating them from others because they had to put in more time and work twice or three times harder than their peers. The reality is that boxing themselves in is part of what it took for each of them to reach their goals. In retrospect, maybe going to counseling to deal with their anxieties and doubts would have been helpful. Maybe a better understanding of their individual disabilities would have helped them to cope in a different manner. However, no one can turn back time and provide them with this support or help now. So, they have boxed in part of themselves to protect themselves and move on with life.

People have public and private sides of themselves as Goffman (1959) describes as frontstage and backstage performances. However, having a disability in our society, even an *invisible* disability makes life more difficult to negotiate than being without a disability. Josephine and Declan chose to let their guard down and share some of their experiences, fears, and feelings as part of this study. They shared as much as they were comfortable sharing and

probably still have ample backstage material that they chose to keep private even from me. They have each become accustomed to having strong boundaries and keeping outsiders clearly on the exterior of their box in order to protect themselves. Even discussing some of the shadows on the backstage may have opened up wounds from their pasts. It is safe to assume that some of their experiences are much worse than what they shared with me. Sharing a dark and twisty past is difficult, which requires the self-imposed boundaries of the box to be relaxed significantly. This is something that few are willing to ever do in their life. This would require true deep honesty with others and more importantly true deep honesty with one's self. The extent to which I was able to gain the trust of the participants and they were comfortable sharing some of the more hidden parts of their lives is directly reflective of the participants' assessment of self-protection and self-preservation while they interacted with me.

Being boxed in at first was due to an external force of being labeled as *different* for both the participants. This label was hurtful and isolating and restricted participants in a bounded space. However, both participants then began to use this space of isolation as also a space of self-protection and preservation from those who could harm them. Over the years, these isolated boxed-in spaces became spaces of comfort, familiarity, hard work, and creativity. And thus, while boxed-in at the start was an oppressive act, the participants were able to transmute it to something to their advantage and eventually used this time and space to develop their craft and identity being something beyond their boxed-in labels.

### **Agency**

Agency is the ability to take action and be effective while assuming responsibility for your own behavior, life, and having capacity to influence yourself (Krieger, 2010). For this study, agency uses the above definition and focuses on strengths and weaknesses of the

participants as their identities become more established and mature. Developing agency continues throughout a lifetime as one's identity develops. Bildungsroman also captures agency as one becomes educated formally and informally through life experiences. In this study, agency is often demonstrated as frontstage performative art that was created on the front of the bag portrait.

As mentioned, Declan received the necessary support he needed most of the time throughout his education. While the support was helpful, he still had to learn his own specific ways to overcome the difficulties he had in school. For example, he figured out on his own that he could use visual prompts and aids to help him complete assignments and did extra work to make sure he could complete the work that others around him were doing without the visual stimuli.

The front of the bag portrait is an example of agency for Declan. He created an image of calm and serenity that he also exuded in the interviews despite discussing his trials growing up. He has developed into someone that appears calm and well put together without much of a hint of doubt in himself. Without hearing his stories and experiences, one may perceive that he has had an easy path to becoming an artist and instructor. Yet the backstage of his bag reveals how hard he works to be successful professionally and manage work and home life.

Josephine has also worked hard to gain agency in her daily life. She knows and understands that she must work harder and take more time to complete many tasks. However, she owns this and incorporates it into her life as needed. Josephine discovered early in life that if she had her hands in clay, her life would be better. Not only does she use clay and sculpture to communicate with others now, she also uses it as a way to relax and center herself. She loves the process of making art with clay. Her artwork is often not necessarily about the finished product.



While the finished product is of obvious importance, making and creating art has become a way for Josephine to fill her soul and prepare her for the rest of what life has to offer.

Josephine and Declan have worked to become responsible beings who have learned to use the visual arts to help them cope with life and to express themselves when other methods have failed them. In the current phase of Josephine's life, she uses the process of art making to help her process her life events and to also make a living. Declan also makes a living by using his visual skills as a graphic designer, painter, and instructor. He continues to incorporate visual tactics to improve his learning and understanding of things around him. While he is still in the early stages of his career, he will likely continue to grow and develop his abilities as a visual artist.

Most people grow and overcome difficult situations in life. Declan and Josephine have had to deal with the typical difficulties of coming of age and have done so while having a disability. They learned that they are responsible for overcoming things that are difficult for them in a unique manner. While they may not have always coped with life in the healthiest of manners, they have each found separate paths that have helped them to reach their goals of becoming professional artists and teaching others to express themselves with the creative arts and be agentic.

While the participants expressed the agentic part of their personalities as a way they show up in life in their interaction with others, they had a different backstory of pain, imprinted memories, and self-doubt and anxieties. Yet even those doubts and anxieties are not the entirety of what drives the participants in their lives. They are both confident individuals, successful in their work, and otherwise would not express the content of the back side of their bag portraits to people. To the outside world, this agency is alluring and also honest. This agency is also a

counternarrative to deficit perspectives that were part of the participants' discourses in their learning environments, which they internalized about themselves early on in their lives, and have worked for the rest of their lives working with and against those counternarratives.

### **Lights Up When Plugged In**

*Lights up when plugged in* is a statement in reference to an account Josephine made about one of her pieces of artwork. She was referring to the piece of artwork called “Shadow of the Steeple” because it had a plug that would turn on a light bulb within the piece. The light shines from the back of the piece to highlight the lyrics of a song written on the back of the wooden box. See figure 4. The piece lights up from the inside out. In this study, this phrase has become a theme to describe situations in which each of the participants are successful. Under the right conditions, Josephine and Declan are able to shine and show the best parts of them as if they had been lit up from the inside out. The phrase *lights up when plugged in* describes the times that Declan and Josephine were inspired, supported, and had successes that let them shine for the world despite the roadblocks in their paths. Being plugged in describes the support or ways of coping they each developed to overcome obstacles to achieve moments they may not have thought were possible as they grew and developed as people and artists. In this section, I will further discuss the conditions and experiences each artist had that exudes the principle of “*lighting up*.” The cord is visible in the lower corner of the image.

**Figure 4.26 The Power Cord**



*Figure 4.26 This is a zoomed image of the power cord that lights the piece from the inside to show off words on the back of the artwork. By Josephine, (2017). *The Cord*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.*

Because Declan had more support as he progressed through his education from tutors, teachers, and parents, he has plenty of examples when he was supported by others and was able to light up and be his best. For example, Declan's teacher took him to visit a graphic designer while he was in high school. This teacher saw something in Declan that he did not see in himself. Because this teacher was supportive of Declan and took a bit of extra time to work with him, he made the decision to major and eventually obtain an MFA in graphic design. Declan also received formal support from his IEP teams in school and the office of disability services when he was in higher education. He also found more informal support from his parents and classmates. The support from others plugged him in. Each of these moments of plugging in helped him to later let his light shine as he grew in his current identity.

The support from others, whether big or small, helped Declan to literally become creative in attempting to hide his weaknesses. He started using images and artwork to compensate for his learning disability. Declan shared that his confidence grew when he used diagrams, drawings, or

graphic design projects to help him when presenting. He used his strength of art to help him plug in and shine. By negotiating this path in this manner, he finished his MFA and has become a professional artist teaching at a community college. One could assume that he will continue to focus on his strengths, work with his weaknesses to persist and overcome dyslexia.

The front of Josephine's bag has a painting of a jack-in-the-box with a three-dimensional ceramic face. See image below. It is a beautiful and unexpected way for Josephine to portray the self she portrays to the world. Around the jack-in-the-box, are the pink-footed canaries that Josephine had created to share words of hope and promise with others. Josephine uses them repeatedly in artwork to be harbingers of good news and positive feelings. The pink-footed canaries are often present in pieces of artwork that demonstrate times when Josephine was plugged in and wants to share her light from the inside out.

**Figure 4.27 Ceramic Jack-in-the-Box**



*Figure 4.27.* This is a close-up image of the Jack-in-the Box's face with pink-footed canaries surrounding it. Image by N. Day, (2017). *Ceramic Jack-in-the-Box*. [photograph]. Copyright 2017.

Josephine literally portrays herself as coming out of a box when asked to capture the essence of what she wants to portray to the world. There are yellow rays of sunshine coming from her head as she springs from the confines of the box. Next to the box is a key that allows the box to be opened. See image below. When the key is plugged into the keyhole, she is released and the light shines. Clearly, creating artwork is how Josephine chooses to shine to the world. Despite all of her weaknesses, the negative thoughts, the wrong self-diagnosis of retardation, Josephine has learned to excel in the area of ceramic and sculptural art with hard work and support from others.

**Figure 4.28 The Key to the Jack-in-the-Box**



*Figure 4.28. A close-up image of the key near the painted Jack-in-the Box keyhole adds a three-dimensional touch to the frontstage of Josephine's bag. Image by N. Day, (2017). Key to the Jack-in-the-Box. [photograph]. Copyright 2017*

While both Declan and Josephine are proud of their artwork, they are also humble when talking about their accomplishments. Josephine is older than Declan by about thirty years. Her artwork is probably more advanced as she is selling her work in many galleries across the United States. Declan is just now reaching the point in his career that he is considering selling his work

online in addition to working as an instructor. Developmentally, Declan is a few steps behind Josephine simply because he is younger despite both participants attending graduate school for the MFA at approximately the same time. Declan will likely keep developing and growing into become a more rounded artist that is able to teach as well as sell his work online or in galleries.

Josephine and Declan each glowed with pride as they discussed their artwork as part of this research. There was pride and a sense of accomplishment exuding from each of them as they told the story behind each piece they choose to share. This was a moment of being plugged in. Through this study, Josephine and Declan voice their struggles with learning that neither of them had ever had the opportunity to share publicly. While they typically keep their learning disability as hidden as possible, both Josephine and Declan enjoyed sharing about their struggles, their paths, and their strengths. They seemed relieved to share their story in a safe setting. Talking about “plugged in” moments was easy, fun, and safe for the participants. They probably share these moments with people all the time. People at restaurants, family reunions, and conferences have likely heard about the “plugged in” moments in these artists’ life.

Josephine and Declan internalized the deficit narratives surrounding their disabilities and integrated those narratives as part of their identity. Yet, for some reason or other, they did not let those deficit narratives be the only markers of their identity. They were able to craft their identity through creativity, a strength for both of them, and find genuine joy in expressing themselves creatively through their work. This is how they felt empowered, agentic, and valued members of their professional communities, a counterstory to their experiences in their learning environments. Sometimes the act of being plugged in occurred by the sheer agentic power of Josephine and Declan and at other times it occurred because someone else helped them plug into the light. However, just like Josephine’s artwork, both Josephine and Declan light up from inside

that is visible from the outside when they are supported, when they are not driven by deficit narratives, and when they focus on their assets and strengths. It is then they are willing to be vulnerable, take risks with their art, find self-expression, and a community of support.

## **Superpower**

Superpower is a theme from this study describing the powerful moments and experiences in life that each Declan and Josephine are fulfilled despite the setbacks they have experienced. Often superpower moments and experiences happen because of the combination being lit up when plugged in (as described above) and belief in self. Superpower is the word that Declan used to describe his ability to see things in a different fashion than those without dyslexia. Superpower is most definitely something that would be expressed on the front side of the bag portrait.

Declan's superpowers include his ability to use visual cues and abilities to compensate and cope with the weaknesses of having a language-based learning disability. He has used his strength of using visual information to help him negotiate his education and life as he came of age. He continues to do so in his current profession teaching two-dimensional art at a community college. Declan feels that because he has weaker skills in the area of reading and writing that his visual skills are enhanced and he uses this advantage as often as possible to create a smoother path for himself throughout all aspects of his life. His use of the word "superpower" during an interview inspired this theme.

Declan also uses his superpowers to help students adjust to higher education. He has a deep understanding of struggling in the educational setting. He can often connect and identify with new students that enter his courses that need additional help to transition to college. He takes pride in using his experiences and coping mechanisms to help others become successful in

college courses. Declan's superpower of negotiating all stages of education as someone with a learning disability as he has developed into an adult provide him with tools to help others who are having similar toils in the classroom. Declan shared that many of his students have never been away from home, may not be strong students, or are considered non-traditional students, who may not feel comfortable in a higher education setting. He enjoys working with these students. He also hopes that the students are able to generalize skills learned in his courses to assist in other courses and areas of life.

Josephine's superpowers include making astonishing pieces of artwork that are sold in galleries across the United States. She has to work long hours to keep up with the demand from customers. Josephine has also been recognized as a prodigious teacher and is sought after to present workshops at colleges and other professional development trainings for those interested in ceramics and sculpture. She is exceptionally talented at creating figurative artwork. Her superpower is making ceramic figures that seem to travel in a dreamlike state to take the observer away from her daily life. She also recognizes symbolism and has a gift for using it in her work. She captures feelings and emotion in clay and glaze. This allows the observer or reader to feel the emotions of the piece of artwork without additional explanation. One specific superpower that Josephine uses is that of the pink-footed canaries. Recall, she created these beautiful creatures as harbingers of good news. She uses them throughout her works, including on the front side of the creative arts bag portrait. They serve as a mascot for Josephine. They give her power to spread good news and hope to others that interact with her work. How could one not smile when they see a clay pink-foot canary bringing them warm wishes? Josephine has the ability to question situations and challenge them with her artwork in a manner that makes other people think and wonder in a nontraditional manner. Josephine would tell people that she



is unable to convey her thoughts, feelings, and objections in writing, so she does so using clay and glaze. Her superpower of creating surreal artistic figures to transport one away from negative experiences and feelings is one that few people could master as easily as she has.

It is noteworthy that both Declan and Josephine wrote children's books to accompany their MFA thesis show with its own requirements. Each graduating student with an MFA was required to host a thesis show composed entirely of their own work. The thesis show should completely fill a large gallery space. In addition to filling the gallery space, students are required to create a professional thesis book that contains images of the pieces included in the show with descriptions of each piece. The show and the thesis book serve as a capstone and must be of high quality for students to meet the final requirements of their terminal degree. Both Josephine and Declan achieved these requirements. It should be noted, both artists decided independently to create their own children's book to accompany the show. While it is a rare occurrence for an additional book to be written, it is more distinctive when one realizes that both artists/authors have a language-based learning disability. Both artists/authors struggled throughout their educational experiences and admitted to avoiding reading and writing in as many situations as possible. Each of them chose to use their visual superpowers to connect with others about their artwork. One may even wonder if Declan and Josephine were writing to their younger selves when they created the children's books.

While both Josephine and Declan would prefer to not have a language-based learning disability, this is not possible. They have learned to cope with and negotiate life with their disability as they matured into adults and beyond. They have worked hard to improve their lives and the lives of those around them. Josephine and Declan both realize they would be different people if they did not have their learning disabilities. They have grown to have a mostly positive

view of disability. While they each still personally struggle with their weaknesses, they are both compassionate and want to help others learn no matter what their abilities are. Josephine stressed that if someone is willing and interested to learn about art she will work with them to help them learn the skills. She only has difficulty teaching those that have no interest in learning. Teaching and helping others with compassion is a superpower shared by Declan and Josephine alike.

Framing the consequences of having a disability as a superpower is indeed a sign of asset-based thinking that Declan expressed. Both Declan and Josephine could be considered having superpowers. These superpowers would be creativity, imagination, hard work, persistence fearlessness, empathy, and compassion. Most people in their positions could have given up at any point in their struggles with deeper imprints of the deficit narratives around disability. Yet Josephine and Declan did not do so and continued on to get the terminal degrees in their field – as in go all the way in education, which is an unfriendly environment to both of them. Yet, it is with their technological, creative, and emotional superpowers that they continued to successfully jump through every hurdle and roadblocks that came in their paths. For anyone who possesses superpowers, these superpowers need a condition for activation. For Josephine and Declan these conditions were the material effect of social structures of oppression playing out in their lives and the lack of laws and protection for people with disabilities. The more they found themselves in oppressive conditions, the more they triggered their superpowers where they became creative, understood their skills, and even escaped to other realms where they were uninhibited in their imagination to develop their craft. Their compassion and empathy towards others stem from cultivating a practice for years of self-compassion and empathy. The more they are able to accept themselves and their struggles, the more they can assist others in similar position. It is not to say

that the participants always master their self-doubts and anxieties, but they have mastered those feelings well enough that even if the feelings rise to the surface, they do not become a roadblock to their work or creativity.

Finally, all beings with superpower also have some weaknesses, arch nemesis, i.e. Kryptonite for Superman. Declan and Josephine's kryptonite was reading and writing and doing anything in public. Yet they both completed their MFAs with a thesis show that would fill a large gallery and would be publicly viewed. Additionally, while not needed, they wrote children's books using their art as a bridge to their writing in the book. If this is not a sign of conquering one's deepest, earliest, imprinted fears, nothing else could then rise to the threshold of challenging one's kryptonite. Josephine's book is published already and is available for people to purchase. Thus, both participants, without even knowing each other, took a similar path to go above and beyond what was expected of them in every stage of their identity development with their excess baggage, transmuting their boxed-in spaces, developing an agentic sense of self, and finding ways to light up from inside when plugged in. These are our modern-day superheroes that can rise above a social system of oppression that continues to marginalize people with disability.

## **Chapter Summary**

It is apparent by now that both Declan and Josephine have become professional artists. Throughout this process, they reflected on their personal experiences of living with a disability. They negotiated their educational systems to graduate multiple times despite having a language-based learning disability. Declan and Josephine identified some of the situations they have had to deal with in schools. They also shared some of the coping mechanisms they use to work around their disability in difficult times. Some of their experiences were similar, while others

were different. The experiences differed the most prior to enrolling in college. Because my participants differ in age, the special education services available to them while in PK-12 schools differed significantly.

Declan attend PK-12 school after the seminal special education laws of the 1970's. He was eligible and received services. He had an individual education plan (IEP) that included appropriate services and modifications to support his learning differences in the school setting. Additionally, his parents were aware of his struggles thus hired tutors and purchased programs to help him with extra practice and strategies after school. Declan reports working with his mother after school often to improve his reading and writing skills.

Josephine graduated from high school in the spring of 1975. She did not have an IEP to create appropriate modifications and accommodations for her while she attended school as a PK-12 student. She struggled the entire time she was in school because no one recognized that she had a language-based learning disability. Josephine's mother recognized that she was working extra hard to get through high school, however, the methods that currently exist for parents to seek additional help for their children in school did not exist in the 1970's where Josephine attended school. Because of the lack of services available to Josephine at the time she went to school, her path was much harder than it needed to be or would have been had she been born a few years later.

Both Declan and Josephine had a label of dyslexia and they struggled with reading, writing, and speaking in front of others. While, similarities exist between Declan and Josephine experiences with dyslexia and art; they still have unique understandings of dyslexia and the path to become professional artists. They negotiated their own routes through the educational systems

in the way that made the most sense to them at the time with the excess baggage of dyslexia in tow.

## **Chapter 5 - Conclusions, Implications, and an Iron Pour**

The experiences of people with language-based learning disabilities have been explored in many ways in the literature. However, few, if any, have examined how people with language-based learning disabilities negotiated their path through each level of education from pre-school to a terminal Masters of Fine Arts degree. For this study, I used my positionality as a school psychologist, special educator, and arts-based researcher to inform this study. I have written this chapter in a scholarly and personal voice. In final portion of this chapter, I share the deeply personal experience of learning to pour iron as part of my growth as a researcher and an artist.

The purpose of the study and the research questions will be the foothold of this chapter. The purpose of this case study is to explore how two people with language-based learning disabilities, who have graduated from MFA programs describe their coping mechanisms, career aspirations, and identity development as a result of being involved in the creative arts.

This study addressed three research questions:

1. In what ways do the participants describe their coping mechanisms (to mitigate their language-based learning disabilities) in relationship to their experiences in creative arts?
2. How did the participants arrive at their career aspirations as a result of negotiating their language-based learning disabilities in the creative arts?
3. What practices did the participants engage in that contributed to their identity development as art professionals with language-based learning disabilities?

In this chapter, I address the research questions and purpose, contributions to the literature, methodological implications and future scholarship. Additionally, I have written an epilogue to conclude this work.

## **Research Questions Unpacked**

While the discussing the literature in special education in chapter two, the following issues were highlighted: professors not knowing appropriate accommodations and modifications, insufficient education background to adequately support students with disabilities, and that higher education requires student-initiated processes to receive accommodations. This is problematic because of stigma and marginalization that students may suffer for disclosing they have a disability. In K-12 settings, the definition of disability is more structured than in higher education and the mandates of special education law are enforced and carried through. Some students with disabilities also feel that due to the lack of IDEA protections in higher education that their disabilities may not affect them any longer and may not request support in higher education. In addition to the issues surrounding special education services in higher education, chapter two discusses art in conjunction with each of the following: healing, therapy, disability, and education. Each of these topics will be addressed in this section. The research questions are answered in an intertwined manner as many of the issues faced by the participants are woven together and not easily separated.

This study certainly reinforces these conversations in the field because the participants shared many similar concerns expressed by others in education. Both Josephine and Declan developed many coping skills to help negotiate their path through their educational settings. They both started using extended time and visual aids and/or representations to help them complete tasks that were difficult. This practice was essential for them to be successful. It started out as a necessity for them in elementary school and developed into practice over time. Combined with creativity as an outlet, these practices cultivated in strong work ethics, due

diligence, attention to detail, self-awareness, and persistence that eventually contributed to their success as artists.

Both Josephine and Declan found that working creatively was comfortable and reduced their stress. In the beginning art was a fun childhood activity in which they were each praised for by adults and peers. However, it developed into much more with time, as both Declan and Josephine matured they began to understand themselves better they learned identify when they were stressed how to handle it using time, isolation, and creativity. This is also true for the doubts they suffered. They learned to create their own support systems using art. This included using art as a safe space from school. Their artwork allowed them to each have a safe place where they developed a skill. With continued work each participant began to cultivate conditions to develop their artistic skills further. As this practice continued they began to understand themselves and their differences, strengths, and weaknesses. Over time Declan and Josephine came to a peace with their experience for the most part. They are now working to understand others they encounter that are also questioning their own skills, doubts, fears, and acceptance of their disabilities. Josephine and Declan have used their pasts as a strength to be helpful and offer people opportunity to move beyond their personal difficulties. Declan and Josephine have created a bigger purpose for themselves. They enjoy helping other people. With time and work each participant has a sense of peace and gratitude for their experiences. They have taken the times in which they feel their superpower and have experiences in which they light up from the inside when plugged in.

When Josephine and Declan started out they were imprinted that they were stupid and could not communicate and should stay away from reading, writing and speaking due to their disabilities. Doubt, depression, and anxiety set in. This caused them to retreat due to the need



for extra time and caused them to escape. Unknowingly, this practice became a set of strong creative skills they each used to advance in the arts. Success in the arts challenged their accepted negative imprinted beliefs and they started to defy the thoughts they should stop avoiding reading, speaking, and writing. They began to teach others. They each wrote children's books to further challenging their imprints from their childhood. They have been able to handle growth to meet the demands in which they have weaker skills without the excess baggage.

Personally, they have each developed a strong sense of identity as artists and as a person. They each receive reinforcement from others to be a working professional artist. As they become more on top of their artistic game by using their strengths, the sting and stigma of having a disability and the doubts it created have become much less. Professionally their artistic skills have allowed them to a position in which they were rewarded for skill. This increased their confidence and moved them forward so much so it has removed them from their fear zones enough to be able to address reading and writing daily and conquer it as needed in their daily lives. Even though they are now in a strong place most of the time, there are still triggers that pop up and self-doubt that lingers in the back of their minds. However, at least when they fall it is not as deep and they are able bring themselves back to the reality that they are capable. The stigma of disability is still there. It will likely always be. However, the safe space each as created in their careers and life is comforting for the most part. But things still come up in their day to day lives in which they must accommodate for that are out of their wheelhouse. Declan and Josephine are now able to better handle these tasks. However, unfortunately, they live in a society in which mental health concerns and disability still have a negative stigma. This society is conveying ablest messages that can be a cause of continuous triggering. Josephine and Declan

are moving through these messages while focus on ability rather than disability as much as possible.

With time, they have been able to grow and cope with their weaknesses and work with them in a way that worked out well for them. Declan received support throughout most of his educational experiences. Josephine benefited from the accommodations and modifications while in higher education. They negotiated their way through settings that were sometimes negative to finally earn terminal master's degrees

### **Contributions to the Literature**

The gap in the literature that was discussed in chapter two included there are insufficient studies in higher education about students with language-based disabilities, especially those who use art as a coping mechanism in addition to other mechanisms. What is also missing from the literature is the deep imprint of stigma of disability from childhood that is carried into adulthood as one develops. Additionally, there is little in the literature that addresses how long lasting stigma affects decisions made by students with learning disabilities. Also, little is known about how, despite the barriers and challenges of people with learning disabilities face throughout their academic life, they progress through all educational levels. Information on what is it in their coping mechanisms, in their beings, in their spirits, in their support structure that allow them to still come to a place of identity development that has not paralyzed them completely but demonstrates how they cultivated the conditions or drew to themselves whatever it is that they needed for their own success has not been explored. An in depth-understanding of this is necessary.

This study begins to fill some of this gap. Because the in-depth interviews provided a great amount of information, a better understanding of these questions has begun. This study

provides an insight into how students with learning disabilities cope with the onslaught of triggering messages to their self-worth throughout their experiences in education and then eventually transform those messages and their feelings of isolation into a strength by the time they enter and continue through higher education.

This study also demonstrates that students with language-based learning disabilities will often choose options in higher education and in their career that are not driven by strong reading and writing requirements. However, should they be put in that position, they would be able to persist and move through those challenges due to their work ethics, perseverance, and sheer unwillingness to give up or give in to the labels that denigrate them.

Some of coping skills of students with disabilities were also uncovered in this study but some questions still exist. For example, if these participants had enough self-awareness to take their time in isolation to develop skill sets that were so valuable that they became successful working artists, what would their lives look like had they been more supported, encouraged early on with more appropriate accommodations and modifications?

Information about understanding of what it means to have a learning disabilities by those that have been labeled as having a language-based learning disability came into question in this study. It appeared that even though Declan was identified as having a learning disability fairly early in his educational career, he did not have a full understanding of what this meant as he developed. It seemed that he was given academic support but he lacked some mental health support that could have helped him to work through doubts and fears as he grew. Josephine suffered from doubts and fears to a higher level than Declan. Because she had no labels or support she jumped to conclusions that fed the increased mental health concerns of anxiety and

likely depression. Had each participant received therapy during their formative years they may not be struggling with the doubts and anxieties that still haunt them when triggered.

Information from this study has begun to answer some of the gaps in the literature that exist about coping mechanisms as one negotiates their way through educational settings. It has also created some additional questions or prompts that can be addressed in future research on topics related to this study. This will be discussed along with the methodological implications in the next section of this chapter.

### **Methodological Implications and Future Scholarship**

In addition to contributing to the literature, this study used innovative methodological means to gather information from the participants. Qualitative methods of interviews, looking at existing creative works, and the creative arts bag portrait were used in a manner only used once before in research to gather information.

First, the use of the creative arts bag portrait as a part of data collection provided information from the participants in a new manner. This method of data collection has only been used by one other researcher, Bhattacharya (2016), to gather information from participants. By looking at the frontstage and the backstage of the paper bags, information about the participants' strengths and weaknesses became apparent when they created the bags, told me about the bags, and then answered questions that I had about the bag. Without the bag, I would not have been prompted to ask many of the questions that provided considerable knowledge about the participants. It also provided me information about how they create their artwork.

Second, this research also focused on the artwork of the participants. The participants were asked to share some pieces of chosen existing artwork. They were able to select the artwork they wanted to share and what they wanted to share with me as we discussed the artwork

during the interviews. The artists that were interviewed were given the opportunity to pick pieces of artwork they were proud to share for me to gather a better understanding of their thinking and artistic process.

Finally, the artwork, interviews, and creative arts bag portrait created a very powerful method trinity of collected information. The information provided ample information to weave together the narratives of each of the participants to share their chosen stories as they negotiated their paths from elementary school through their terminal MFA degrees as they dealt with their language-based learning disabilities. Eventually the bag allowed the discussion of how the participants dissolved several back and front stage boundaries so that what they did in isolation in the backstage space became what they revealed to the world later as their art or assignments that were visual in nature.

Based on the results of this study, I discuss the following implications and the possibilities of future research. The future research possibilities emerging from this study could be in the areas of special education, art, K-12 education, and higher education. For example, worthy research topics stemming from this research include finding out what are the art experiences of students with learning disabilities in high schools. It would also be worth researching what experience and education high school art teachers have with working with students with disabilities.

Additional information about the current policies of working with students with disabilities in higher education is critical. Studies of colleges or universities that have been found to be doing a good job of serving and supporting students with disabilities could provide knowledge to other universities to help them better serve their students. Along with this information it could be beneficial for many universities to research their own strengths and

weaknesses of serving students with disabilities on their own campuses. Studies with professors on their knowledge of how to support students with disabilities in their classes could provide information that would have supported current and future students that also have similar disabilities as Josephine and Declan. Further study of how to best equip parents of children with learning disabilities could also help to alleviate some of the fears and anxieties that the parents and students have as they learn to cope with their disabilities in their daily living.

Research on the mental health concerns of those that have been determined to have a disability could be beneficial to help support others that are labeled as having a learning disability in the future. Information about how to best support and provide mental health to students in a developmentally appropriate manner as the student grows could be incorporated into the best practices of mental health providers such as school psychologists and school counselors.

Those that work with students with disabilities at multiple levels of education could benefit from these studies being published in the literature. For example, the following stakeholders may find this and the above suggested research of help to their practice: those that work with people with disabilities in general, educators in schools who train scholars in disability work, educators in schools who train teachers in disability work, and those in schools train mental health folks in disability work.

In addition to research surrounding disabilities, further scholarship involving art is necessary. For example, arts-based research investigating how those that create drawings or other art have changes in stress levels would be helpful for educators and mental health providers. This study could also inspire someone to further research the benefits of art on

mental health specifically looking at mindful practices. Artists, mental health providers, and educators could potentially benefit from this research.

So many opportunities for further research are available for those interested in the trinity of special education, art, and mental health. Those mentioned above are only a few areas that could use research to help fill in the gaps in the literature. Research in these areas could help the future Declans and Josephines across educational settings.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I reviewed and discussed the research purpose and questions, the methodological implications, and future scholarship. Information about how the participants negotiated their way through K-12 and higher education with a language-based learning disability was shared as well as a summary of the findings of the arts-based narrative inquiry research. Additionally, a plan for future research is outlined to potential help those with disabilities and those that serve them in academic and mental health settings.

## **Iron Pour Bildungsroman: An Epilogue**

This epilogue is a closing statement and reflection on how to take moments of discomfort and transmute it to moments of opportunities, reflection, identity development and growth, much like the participants. Out of an ethical obligation to the participants who chose to make themselves vulnerable to me for the purpose of this study, this is my reciprocity, where I make myself vulnerable to discuss the challenges of writing a non-traditional dissertation – a process of my own bildung. In qualitative research, the researcher's narrative is just as critical as the participants' narratives. However, I wanted the participants' narratives to be centered more than mine, and therefore, my narrative is the concluding bildungsroman and a reflection on arts-based activity that parallels the process of writing a non-traditional dissertation. I write this for my coming of age as a doctoral student but also for those who in the future might consider doing non-traditional dissertation work. May we always find ways to be honest with what lurks in our backstages and backs of our bag portraits so that eventually we can cross the borders of the front and back stages in how we express ourselves in the world without the kind of fears and anxiety Josephine, Declan and many others experience.

As part of this arts-based research process, I learned about the background and struggles Declan and Josephine encountered as they negotiated their paths through their educational settings. I often found myself reflecting on my educational journey as well. My K-12 and much of my higher education adventure differed from Josephine and Declan. I do not have a language-based learning disability. However, I have had my own struggles while attempting to obtain a doctorate degree. I have learned to battle doubts, fears, feelings of being an imposter, and have been forced to engage and deal with my backstage material. Prior to my studies at Kansas State University, I did a good job of pretending my backstage material did not exist. However,



throughout the process of thinking about the dissertation, figuring out my subjectivities, and working through the process of edit after edit, I have been forced to uncover the parts of my past that I am uncomfortable with and ashamed of and learned to use my past experiences to become the best version of myself. This process has opened me up to being vulnerable often.

Sometimes the feelings of vulnerability come from seemingly nowhere as I write. I have learned to honor and explore the feelings in order to move past them before I can make progress on the research. Sometimes the feelings change what I had planned to write. I hope in that being vulnerable and opening myself up to this process wholly make this a better and more authentic piece of work.

Many of my colleagues, all with doctorate degrees, have stressed that “the only good dissertation is a done dissertation.” While I understand what they are trying to tell me, I also know that they do not understand why I decided to tackle a dissertation that is considered to be non-traditional and why I chose to add elements that were not required. Many times, people (many of whom are in the field of education) have rolled their eyes as I describe the work that I am doing. Their follow-up statements often suggest that I should have just done a quick study and moved on with my life. This bothers me a lot. I do not mind people being critical of my work. I have learned that critical feedback is part of the process. However, it bothers me that so many educators that I have come into contact with have encouraged me to take the easy way out and just move on. Educators should do just the opposite. They should encourage people to learn as much about themselves and the topic of interest as possible. I know that many people who have suggested the easy path for me, also brag about putting their dissertation up on a shelf and never looking at it again. They did not use it to further their research agenda or even publish one article from the research they spent over a year of their life working on. Because I chose to

negotiate a less traditional path, I hope that I do not set this document on the shelf and forget about it. I truly intend to work further on this research.

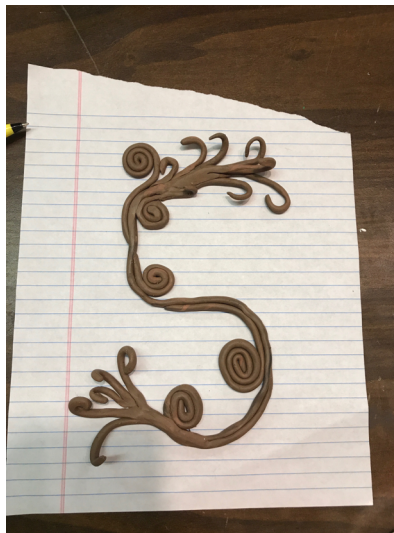
I also plan to continue my education once I finish this degree. While I have sworn that I will not finish another degree, I am already thinking about courses that I will now have the freedom to take. I took one such class in this semester while I was writing about the experiences of Declan and Josephine. I took a course through the local arts council and learned to pour iron. I have never done such a thing and I am not sure why I decided that this was what I needed to do to finish this research project. However, I did. I signed up and took the course with only the basic knowledge of what pouring iron would entail. I had other watched people pour iron many times and had asked those that participated in the pour many questions. However, after a couple of class periods, I quickly learned that I did not even know what questions I should be asking.

I knew when I started the iron pour class that I wanted to make a paper bag. So much of my doctoral program has revolved around the paper bag. First, the paper bag was just a project that I had to do for a class. However, it quickly became a tool to help me learn about myself and others when used as a creative arts bag portrait. I learned the superpower that the bag contained. The superpower of allowing people to share information about themselves in a highly creative manner while still protecting themselves from too much vulnerability is a key tenet of the paper bag. I participated in research myself using the paper bag. In my pilot study, there was a paper bag. My participants for this study, created amazing paper bags. It became obvious to me that I needed to make an iron paper bag.

The first night of class we had to start the mold, however, I did not bring a paper bag so I started making a number five with oil clay to pass the time. It became fancier and fancier as the night proceeded. I decided it need to go on the front of my bag. It is my front stage. It

represents the last chapter of a project that I am proud of. I did not want to hide it on the back side of the bag. Below is the fancy five I created with reusable oil clay. This was my first experience working with oil clay. I felt so much pressure to make the work just right. I took cues from those around me. However, I noticed over time that no one else in class, beyond the instructor, knew what they were doing either. We were a class of novices. However, I still pressured myself to do my best. I did not want people to think poorly of me.

**Figure 5.1 Fancy Five in Progress**



*Figure 5.1.* The Fancy Five was made to from reusable oil to create the negative space in the mold for the front side of the bag. Photo by B. Crawford (2017), *Fancy Five*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.

Then next night, I brought a small gift bag to use to make part of the mold for the iron. A full-size grocery bag would have been too heavy to carry around. The fancy five fit on the bag just right. I also made a clock to go on the back side of the bag. Because of the significant time restraints while completing this dissertation and I felt a clock would represent time well. I really do not want others to know or remember how long I have really been working to earn this

degree. I still feel shame when I think about my path to earning this degree. However, this failure is part of me but no longer defines me. I remind myself this often. I am more than my failures. Below is an image of the five on the Christmas gift bag.

**Figure 5.2 Fancy Five on a Bag**



*Figure 5.2.* The fancy five is on the bag and will be used to make a mold to pour iron into. Photo by B.L. Crawford (2017), *Fancy Five on a Bag*, [photograph] Copyright 2017.

Once the bag was created, the next step was to create a flask for the mold to fit into. The flask was simply made of cardboard and stuck together with hot glue. A critical part of this art class is that we all had to work together. I only knew one person in the class when we started but a couple of weeks later, we were all helping each other. By the time the class was over, I had talked with each participant about my dissertation. Each person listened, asked questions, was

encouraging, and consented to letting me use their images as part of the dissertation. I have even seen a couple of the people since the class ended that want to know when I defend and the results of the defense. None of these people are from the world of academia. None of them passed judgement on me or asked why I did not just do a quick study. They were all genuinely interested in my research and my participants. This class was a wonderful stress reliever during a time in which I was spending hours a day writing. I had to think differently. I had to venture out of my wheelhouse in order to be successful in this course. Just as Delcan and Josephine are required to do on almost a daily basis. Taking the class was not easy. Everything was new to me. However, it was a safe place to make mistakes and ask questions. So, I did. I also learned that the mold and pour could not work without the help and collective work of the entire group. There were multiple *lights up when plugged in* moments while working on creating the iron paper bag. Below is an image of me getting help from a classmate to make a flask for the mold. It seemed simple enough to just hot glue some cardboard together. However, I needed help to hold everything in place without burning myself with the hot glue.

**Figure 5.3 Making a Flask for the Mold**



*Figure 5.3. I had help to make a flask for the mold out of cardboard and hot glue. Photo by A. Frank (2017), *Making a Flask for the Mold*, [photograph] Copyright 2017.*

Once the flask was made, a mixture of sand and chemical was placed in the bottom of the flask. I filled the bag with playground sand and laid it gently in the flask. I packed a bit more of the sand mixture around the bag until it was covered half way. See the image below. This sat for a couple of days to cure in order to be ready for the top part of the mold to be created. Just as the writing process took more time than anticipated, so did the process of making a mold for the iron bag. Patience is needed for both processes.

**Figure 5.4 Drag of the Mold**



*Figure 5.4.* The paper bag has been placed in the sand mixture to form the bottom of the mold otherwise called the drag. Next, I will place additional sand mixture on top and allow it to harden. Photo by A. Frank (2017), *Bottom of the Mold Done*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.

Once the sand mixture cured, I put additional sand mixture on the top of the paper bag gently to avoid messing up the fancy five. In the image below, you can see that I just used my hands to make the mold. Gloves were necessary as the chemical was corrosive. I equate the corrosiveness of the chemicals to the corrosiveness of not taking care of oneself when you are in high stress situations. I had to learn to take care of myself even more than usual as I proceeded through the highly stressful process of writing a dissertation. I had to protect myself from my own detrimental thoughts and practices, just as I had to protect myself with gloves.

The entire process of creating sand mold is quite simple. Much simpler than I had anticipated. However, now that I understand the process, it makes perfect sense. Sandcasting has been used for about 4,000 years and the process remains remarkably similar as it did in the



past. I learned there is no reason to make it more difficult than it needs to be. The same can be said for the process of writing a dissertation. Certain elements must be present in order for it to work out as required.

### **Figure 5.5 Placing Sand on the Bag**



*Figure 5.5.* I had to place the sand mixture on the bag in the flask to create the cope of then mold for the iron to be poured into. Photo by A. Frank (2017), *Placing Sand on the Bag*, [photograph] Copyright 2017.

Once the sand was mixed, I placed baby powder on the top of the bag help prevent the cope of the mold from sticking to the clay and the bag. Another simple step that helps to ensure the piece will turn out. See the image on the next page.



**Figure 5.6 Baby Powder on the Bag**



*Figure 5.6.* Before the top portion of the mold was created, baby powder was placed on the piece to aid with the mold separation once the mold is hard. Photo by A. Frank (2017), *Baby Powder*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.

Once the cope or the top of the mold was hard, we cut the mold open with knives and it split in two equal pieces. I had to remove all of the playground sand, the oil clay and the paper. If I would have left any debris the likelihood of the piece failing would have been higher. There are so many steps that must be followed or the piece may not turn out. In fact, even when everything is done correctly, the mold may fail and the artwork will not turn out as intended. My son, Deegan, begged me to accompany me to class. He helped me remove all of the bag and clay from the mold. He was quite helpful as his hands were smaller than mine. In fact, he helped many others in the class to work on their molds. Tiny hands and an eager kid were a perfect combination for this part of the process. Because I have been introduced to arts-based research

and encouraged to not ignore my creative side while I was completing my doctoral work, my children have been able to help me with this process. Lately, I have spent a lot of time distracted by writing and it cut into time that I would have been spending with them. However, this class and other arts-based sections of this study allowed us to spend time together. They created projects along side of me. Below is an image of Deegan digging out the clay from the mold with a forged iron tool. In the next image, he is giving me advice on removing the paper from the bag stuck in the mold.

**Figure 5.7 Removing the Fancy Five**



*Figure 5.7. Deegan helped me to remove the oil clay from the fancy five to create the negative space needed to create the number on the front of the bag. Photo by A. Frank (2017), *Removing the Fancy Five*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.*

**Figure 5.8 Negative Space from the Sand**



*Figure 5.8. Negative Space* The mold for the iron is made by using negative space. The paper bag was torn to remove the sand. Where the sand existed will be iron once the pour is done. Photo by A. Frank (2017), *Negative Space*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.

**Figure 5.9 It Takes a Village**



*Figure 5.9.* Deegan helped me remove all of the oil and the paper from the mold. It was necessary to do so to create the paper bag mold. Photo by A. Frank (2017), *Takes a Village*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.

Finally, he took over and just told me to watch. It was nice to see him do something he enjoys so much. Deegan also has a language-based learning disability. He has experienced similar issues that Declan and Josephine shared with me. Once when I was telling people about my research, he looked up with big eyes behind his orange glasses and said, “Just like me, Mom.” I nodded and reassured him that my participants were able to do great things despite some of the setbacks and roadblocks in their paths. I hope that I am able to help him successfully negotiate his own educational path. Everyone has difficulties, I want my son to know that he can learn to cope with his to find a life that he is comfortable with, just as I have done. Hard work and determination can help to overcome complications that we face.



**Figure 5.10 Art Kid Took Over**



*Figure 5.10.* Deegan attended the last few classes with me. He wanted to help me with my dissertation. Here he is using his small hands to finish cleaning out the mold. Photo by A. Frank (2017), *Art Kid Took Over*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.

**Figure 5.11 Trying to Avoid Iron from Leaking**



*Figure 5.11.* Adhesive was put on each side of the mold to better hold it in place during the iron pour. Photo by A. Frank (2017), *Trying to Avoid Iron from Leaking*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.

Once the mold was created and cleared of all of the debris, we glued it back together with a special adhesive. In the image above, you can also see the cable wire that was placed in the mold to create the handles of the bag. The instructor said this is rarely done and seemed to enjoy helping me come up with a creative idea for putting handles on the bag. I pushed the boundaries of what is typically done while creating iron artwork also to best match the concept in my head to create my work. Below I am helping the instructor, put the mold back together as Deegan supervises.

**Figure 5.12 Help Putting It Together**



*Figure 5.12. The instructor helped me to glue my mold in place prior to the iron pour. Photo by A. Frank (2017), *Help Putting It Together*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.*

Once the molds were done, we had to prepare the iron to melt in the furnace. We broke apart old sinks and radiators with a sledge hammer to make them small enough to melt in the furnace. It took a lot of swings of a sledge hammer to make the pieces the size of a credit card. There is an image below of a bit of this process. There are so many behind the scenes steps in making a piece of artwork out of iron. I had no idea the number of steps required. It is similar to completing this dissertation and the doctorate program in general. I found myself having to do so many extra things and steps that I had no idea where necessary to create quality work. So much work has gone into this entire study that has been invisible work. I took the basic design course to help me learn some of the skills necessary to create during this process. I worked with

three professional artists to get the images needed for documentation in the dissertation. There have been countless consultations with artists and educators throughout my study to gather differing points of view, ideas, and to check for understanding. Of course, there has been draft after draft of each of these sections. I learned to get the words on paper and make them pretty later. Some of these same invisible steps happened while working towards the iron pour.

**Figure 5.13 Everything Including the Kitchen Sink**



*Figure 5.13.* The instructor taught us to break up a sink and radiator to use to feed the iron furnace. Photo by A. Frank (2017), *Everything Including the Kitchen Sink*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.

Just as it took months of writing a little bit at a time, it took a lot of little pieces of iron to eventually create the artwork of the participants in class. Below are the credit card sized pieces of a sink and a radiator that were melted to feed the furnace. This is just a small amount of iron. We ended up actually using about 1,000 pounds of iron to pour each of the pieces of artwork the night of the pour.



**Figure 5.14 All the Pieces**



*Figure 5.14. All the Pieces* The sink and radiator were broken into pieces the size of a credit card with a sledge hammer. Photo by B.L. Crawford (2017), *All the Pieces*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.

After an unplanned delay caused by the weather, we ended up combining our class iron pour with a class at the local university. Originally, we were supposed to pour our pieces of artwork as part of a performance art during the biggest art walk of the year. However, sand molds tend to fail in the rain and we were forced to wait another week. I was disappointed that we had to wait. I was so excited to share our work with the larger public. I wanted them to see that most anyone could participate in an iron pour and the creative process. However, I settled for inviting as many friends and colleagues to the iron pour on campus. I wanted those that had never seen such a process to learn and step a bit out of their comfort zone. Below is an image of Gus. Gus is the name of the iron furnace on campus. The furnace is heated using coke and gas to about 3,000 degrees to get the iron to reach the appropriate temperature to pour into the molds.

**Figure 5.15 Fire Breathing Gus**



*Figure 5.15. Gus is the name of the furnace that was used to melt the iron using coke and gas. Photo by A. Frank (2017), *Fire Breathing Gus*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.*

Once the furnace has reached 3,000 degrees, the iron is ready to pour. A plug made of clay, water, and sawdust is removed from the furnace by someone wearing gloves, and the iron flows into a large ladle. The image below is a close-up view of this process.

**Figure 5.16 Gus is Ready**



*Figure 5.16.* The furnace reached 3,000 degrees and the iron is ready to pour into the molds. Photo by A. Frank (2017), *Gus is Ready*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.

Once the iron is in the ladle, it is necessary to move quickly and safely to the molds to pour before the iron cools. Each of the molds is placed in a particular order to ensure efficiency in pouring. There are also extra people there to help make sure things work smoothly. Someone is checking the furnace to make sure the temperature is staying steady. Additional coke and iron



are added as necessary. There are also a couple of people standing by with shovels on “fire watch.” If the mold leaks, it is their job to put out the fire by covering it with sand. Below is an image in which two people who are holding the ladle while one person scrapes the iron out and a fourth person stand on fire watch. Each of these steps are more visible steps in the process of creating the artwork. I equate these steps to some of the more visible milestones I met while working on my dissertation, such as passing the proposal, obtaining IRB approval, and having the data transcribed. These steps indicators that I was making progress. Putting and rearranging words on paper are not as obvious as completing the coding of data or scheduling a defense date

**Figure 5.17 The Ladle in Action**



*Figure 5.17. Ladle in Action* Students wearing protective gear are pouring the molten iron into a mold. Photo by A. Frank (2017), *Ladle in Action*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.

Again, I see many similarities between pouring iron and completing a dissertation. While my peers may not be standing by with a shovel as I write, they seem to always be around. The classes and the writing retreats that I participated in have created a community for me to safely finish my dissertation despite any setbacks that happen. We are there to support and encourage each other. We complained to each other. We shared with each other. We cried with each other. Unless we happen to be at a writing retreat or traveling together for a conference, most of this support happens from a distance. However, distance does not diminish the support and caring between us.

Another similarity between pouring iron and completing a dissertation is that people support me in a way that kept me grounded. Not all of the support that I have received has been nice and soft. Often, someone had called me out at just the right time. Once someone called me out about feeling guilty about spending so much time writing. The person reminded me that I was the only person putting that guilt on myself. Another person in my dissertation group, called me out for complaining about writing the last chapter. I was feeling sorry for myself and all of the fun I was missing out on with friends when my fellow doctoral candidate, told me to get over it. I was almost done and needed to finish. While it was not sugarcoated and sweet, it was exactly what I needed to hear in that moment to move past the road block I had put in front of myself and get writing.

I waited for hours for it to be time to pour my iron piece. We reinforced the mold with blocks and sand all around in hopes that the mold would not break open. I really wanted my piece to turn out. I wanted to make a piece that I would be proud to show my committee as well as all of the naysayers who encouraged me to complete a more predictable dissertation. In the

image and video below. They are actually pouring my iron bag. Click on the image to see a video of actual iron pouring into the mold.

**Figure 5.18 Pouring the Iron Paper Bag Image and Video**



*Figure 5.18.* By clicking on this image, you will be linked to a short video of the iron being poured to make the iron paper bag. You could also copy and paste this link to your browser: <https://youtu.be/gPuyDfTKOx8>. Video by B.L. Crawford (2017), *Pouring the Iron Paper Bag*, [video] Copyright 2017; Photo by B.F. Leeds (2017), *Pouring the Iron Paper Bag*, [photograph] Copyright 2017.

Once the piece was poured, all I could do is stand and watch it smolder. The glowing iron peeked out from the vent and the pour holes teasing me. There was nothing that could be done now. I just had to be patient. Patience is not a quality that is high on my list of skills. I watched them pour other pieces and asked questions about the process while the piece cooled.

**Figure 5.19 Did It Turn Out?**



*Figure 5.19. The iron bag has been poured. The only thing to do is wait for it to cool down. Photo by B.L. Crawford (2017), *Did It Turn Out?*. [photograph] Copyright 2017*

The iron pour was something my boys looked forward to attending. They were each able to complete scratch blocks and make their own pieces. Another benefit of completing arts-based research is that I have come to know the art professors well and so have my children. Because of this connection, the boys were invited to make their own artwork. My oldest son has been invited to take the blacksmithing class next year for college credit despite only being a

sophomore in high school. The connections I have made with others throughout this dissertation process have developed into friendships. I am thankful for pushing myself beyond what was expected of me and most importantly what I thought I was capable of doing.

Iron cools surprisingly fast, before we left for the night, we were able to unearth the iron bag. However, it was too hot to touch with our hands and we used tools to uncover the piece. I had to leave it out for the night to cool off enough to touch it. I had to wait a few more hours. The image below is of the bag the night it was poured. There are iron pour spouts on the bottom and excess iron on the sides. There is also sand stuck to the piece. All I know when I left for the night, is that it looks somewhat like a bag and the handles look great. I had high hopes of knowing exactly what it would look like once we dug it out of the sand. But this was not the case. I learned about another invisible step to creating art. Waiting. I picked up the piece the next day on the way to work, still not knowing if the piece turned out as I anticipated or not. It looked the same. A bit of sand came off when I touched it. I hoped that was a good sign. I did not work on it much at home as I was afraid of messing up the piece. I did not know how rough I could be in my attempts to get the sand off the bag.



**Figure 5.20 Is that My Fancy Five?**



*Figure 5.20.* The iron bag has been unearthened. This is the front side of the bag. Photo by B.L. Crawford (2017), *Is that My Fancy Five?* [photograph] Copyright 2017.

A few days later Deegan and I went to meet with the instructor. We started brushing the front of the bag with a wire brush. I learned that there is not much I could have done to mess up the piece. It is made of iron and it takes a lot to mess the surface. This is obvious to me now but I did not want to take any chances. I want to be able to showcase my work!

### Figure 5.21 Grinding the Iron



*Figure 5.21.* After watching the instructor use the grinder, it was my turn to cut off the excess iron. Photo by A. Frank (2017), *Grinding the Iron*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.

The front side of the bag came out okay. It did not look exactly as I anticipated, however, it was acceptable. This is exactly how the front side of all of the paper bags should be. Maybe things do not go as planned but they turn out okay. The front of the bag is the frontstage. It is putting your best foot forward with pride. The backside of the bag is where mistakes are hidden. True to this rule, the backside of my bag did not turn out as anticipated. Apparently, there may have been some extra moisture in the sand mixture and the sand fused to the iron during the pour. The sand is permanently embedded into the iron. The wire brush is not going to take away the sand on the back of the bag. I was told that if I spent about four hours with a large powerful grinder, I may get most of the sand removed. However, I do not own a large grinder nor do I have four hours to spend grinding the bag. I had a dissertation to write! So, I

chose to leave the backside of the bag as it is. It is not as I intended but the front looks better than the backside.

**Figure 5.22 Hidden Back Side**



*Figure 5.22.* The sand from the mold stuck to the iron. The instructor thinks the sand in the mold may have had moisture in it causing it to stick into the iron. Photo by B.L. Crawford (2017), *Hidden Back Side*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.

This is exactly what my real backside of the bag would look like. I am not proud of it but it is part of me and without the back of the bag there would be no front of the bag to be proud of. I have struggled over the last few weeks with the way the bag turned out. I knew I followed all of the outlined steps and I assumed it would turn out as expected. However, as with life, that is not always true. I will always keep this bag. It is a perfect thirty-pound reminder that things do not always turn out as anticipated. It is symbolic of my journey to becoming a doctor. Just like

my path of finishing the doctorate. It may not have been pretty but with a lot of work, I grew and learned a lot about myself while gaining some amazing friends and knowledge along the way. Just as little pieces of junk iron were turned into a piece of artwork, I took pieces of me that I did not know what to do with to finish this project. Declan and Josephine did so to as they negotiate their path through their education. Little pieces of material, fire, supportive people, and perserverience helped shape them into the people they are today and to light up from the inside when plugged in.

It is likely that I am being harder on myself than necessary. Others have seen the bag and like the way it looks. One sculpture professor asked me how I made the sand embed in the iron. He would like to try that in the future. While I appreciated his enthusiasm for inventing something new, I still would have liked a nice clock on the back of my thirty-pound iron bag. We put rust on it to patina the iron to help it turn brown and resemble a paper bag. Because I am persistent, I have created a new mold for a bag and will pour it tomorrow night at the local art walk in hope this will turn out as anticipated. I have my fingers crossed. Below is the front side of the first draft of my iron bag.

**Figure 5.23 Patina on the Fancy Five**



Figure 5.23. *Patina on the Fancy Five* Here is the front side of the 30-pound iron bag. Photo by B. Crawford (2017), *Patina on the Fancy Five*. [photograph] Copyright 2017.

Since completing this iron bag, I was able to make another mold in attempt to create the iron bag concept that was in my head. The iron pour was held during the local art walk and many people from the area attended the pour. While waiting for my piece to be poured, I was interviewed by the local newspaper about my artwork. The questions lead to my dissertation and I was given the opportunity to tell the newspaper about my arts-based narrative inquiry research. It was a fantastic opportunity to talk about my study.

While the iron bag did not turn out as I anticipated in the second pour, I have plans to create another mold with a different method this fall. I will continue work towards getting the iron paper bag to turn out correctly. I now have a team of sculpture experts trying to figure out the best way to make the iron bag. It takes a village to find success.

As I have progressed through this program, the dissertation, and beginning learning to pour iron, I have also continued on the process of coming of age. I have learned some life lessons that can only be learned through the process of hard work and persistence. I have had to deal with stuff from the backside of my bag that affects the front side of my bag. I will continue to do so. However, completing this degree will be something that I proudly put on my front stage for all to see. While some of the lessons learned will linger on the backside. As I proceed, I will keep in mind the quote by Gilda Radner (n.d.), "I wanted the perfect ending. Now I've learned, the hard way, that some poems don't rhyme, and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Life is about not knowing, having to change, and making the best of it without knowing what is going to happen next. Delicious ambiguity."

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## **Appendix A - Email Solicitation and Informed Consent**

Subject: Request for Participation in a Doctoral Study

Please read for an opportunity to participate in a research study with a doctoral student at Kansas State University.

My name is Betsy Crawford, and I am pursuing my Doctorate in Education through Kansas State University. I am working on a study as one of the requisites for my program and would like to invite you to consider being a participant in such research study. The purpose of this study is to gain insight from the collaborative experiences of a graduate of a Masters of Fine Arts Degree, who has a language-based learning disability. The information this study will produce will help inform present and future educational systems to work with students with language-based learning disabilities that major in the creative arts. This study has received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, Approval (#) for the use of human subjects.

Participation in the study is absolutely voluntary. In order to participate, you must be a graduate of a Masters of Fine Arts degree program in the studio arts and have a language-based learning disability. If you are selected, you will be briefed to the study where you will complete an informed consent form. As the participant, you will be given the opportunity to select a pseudonym to protect your identity; however, if you do not, one will be assigned.

As the participant, you will be asked to complete three audio-recorded interviews with me and the length of these interviews will be between 30 and 60 minutes. The time and place of the interviews will be private, mutually agreed upon, ensuring that the times are convenient and the locations comfortable for you.

The data collected will be analyzed in a research context and your name will remain confidential at all times. Once the data analysis is complete, you will receive the findings and be asked to review and provide additional insight. You will be in complete liberty of removing yourself, or any of the information, from the study and may do so at any time and without penalty.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me by (date) so we can make arrangements to meet for an informational session where you will have opportunities to ask questions. If you are satisfied with the answers and feel so inclined, I would like to invite you to participate in the study. Please feel free to contact me at [betsycrawford@ksu.edu](mailto:betsycrawford@ksu.edu), 785-259-3959.

Sincerely,

Betsy Crawford, Student

College of Education, Department of Educational Leadership

321 Bluemont Hall

Manhattan, KS 66506



## **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

### **KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY**

**PROJECT TITLE:** Arts-Based Narrative Inquiry: Experiences of Negotiating Educational Systems with a Language-Based Learning Disability to Achieve a Career in the Creative Art

**APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT:**      **EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT:**

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Dr. Warren White

**CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):** Betsy Crawford

**CONTACT NAME AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:**

Dr. Warren White 785- 532-6349 [wwhite@ksu.edu](mailto:wwhite@ksu.edu)

Betsy Crawford 785-259-3959 [betsycrawford@ksu.edu](mailto:betsycrawford@ksu.edu)

**IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION:**

- Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224
- Jerry Jaax, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance and University Veterinarian, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

**SPONSOR OF PROJECT:** N/A

**PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:** The purpose of this case study is to explore how two people with language-based learning disabilities, who have graduated from Masters of Fine Arts (MFA) programs describe their coping mechanisms, career aspirations, and identity development as a result of being involved in the creative arts.

**PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:**

The researcher will contact people with a MFA degree to find out if they have a language-based learning disability. If the person meets both of these criteria, they will be asked to participate in the study. If they agree, they will sign the consent form. Participants will participate in approximately three semi-structured interviews, create a creative arts bag portrait (See Appendix B for additional information), and share existing artwork and/or sketchbook with the researcher

I understand that:

- The researcher will audio record and transcribe interviews and meetings that occur.
- Interviews will last from 30-60 minutes each.

**LENGTH OF STUDY:** The study should last from 3-4 months.

**RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:** The researcher does not anticipate any risks or discomforts to the participant.

**BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:** Participants of this study will be able to reflect on their progress through their educational path. Information collected may add to the literature of the area of study.

**EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:**

In this study, the researcher will take the following measures to ensure confidentiality:

1. A pseudonym will be used unless the participant requests their name be used.
2. If requested, no identifying information about the participants will ever be used in any format of presentation of research data. Participants will be able to review the transcripts and information. They may request any information be redacted and not shared.
3. All research data will be stored in password protected devices (iPad, recording device, and laptop computer)
4. Research records will be stored in a secure filing cabinet in the researcher's office.

5. Only the researcher will have access to any identifiable data related to the participant, which will be secured in a filing cabinet in the researcher's office in addition to password protected electronic files in the researcher's laptop and iPad.

6. Only the researcher will have access to the audio recordings and will conduct all transcriptions.

7. Any identifiable details shared in the course of the study will be fictionalized.

8. Three years after the conclusion of the study, the videos will be destroyed as per suggested qualitative research protocol.

Data will be shared dissertation major professor and committee members with the same standards of confidentiality.

At the request of participant(s), names will be removed from transcribed correspondence, observation, and interviews if necessary.

**TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time.**

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

**Participant Name/Title:**

**Participant**

**Signature:**

# Appendix B - Institutional Review Board Approval

Master PDF Editor - Demo Version

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY: IRB Protocol # Application Received: Routed: Training Complete:



Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB)

## Application for Approval Form

Please send your completed application to [comply@k-state.edu](mailto:comply@k-state.edu)

### INSTRUCTIONS

**Be sure to save the application PDF to your computer before you begin completing the form. You may not be able to save your changes if you edit this form in a web browser.**

The KSU IRB is required by law to ensure that all research involving human subjects is adequately reviewed for specific information and is approved prior to inception of any proposed activity. Consequently, it is important that you answer all questions accurately. If you need help or have questions about how to complete this application, please call the Research Compliance Office at 532-3224, or e-mail us at [comply@ksu.edu](mailto:comply@ksu.edu).

Please provide the requested information in the outlined text boxes. The text boxes are designed to accommodate responses within the body of the application. As you type your answers, the text boxes will expand where appropriate and as needed. After completion send your application by e-mail to [comply@k-state.edu](mailto:comply@k-state.edu).

You may sign this form using a digital signature. DO NOT sign the form until it has been completed. You cannot edit the form entries once the form has been digitally signed. If you are making revisions to a previously signed form, right-click the digital signature and select Clear to remove the signature (this can only be done by the person who originally digitally signed the form).

Forms that have not been signed will not be accepted.

*Additional material is requested with this application. Be sure to provide electronic copies of the following documents (if applicable) and submit them to [comply@k-state.edu](mailto:comply@k-state.edu) along with your application:*

Consent Form (see *Administrative Information, IX. Informed Consent A.*)  
Sponsor's grant application or contract as submitted to the funding agency. (See *Administrative Information*)  
Surveys, instruments, etc used for data collection (see *V. Design and Procedures C.* and *X. Project Information P.*)  
Debriefing statement to be utilized (see *IX. Informed Consent E.*)

**FAILURE TO PROVIDE ALL INFORMATION REQUESTED MAY LEAD  
TO A DELAY IN PROCESSING YOUR REQUEST.**

**Please proof read and check spelling BEFORE submitting the form.  
To use Acrobat spelling check, press F7 or select EDIT, CHECK SPELLING**

**PLEASE CONTINUE TO THE NEXT PAGE  
TO BEGIN COMPLETING THE FORM**

**ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION:**

Title of Project/Course: Arts-Based Narrative Inquiry: Experiences of Negotiating Educational Systems with a Language-Based Learning Disability to Achieve a Career in the Creative Arts

Type of Application: ☐ New / Renewal ☒ Revision (to a pending new application)  
(check one box)  
☐ Modification to an existing approved application #:

Principal Investigator Details: (must be a KSU faculty member):

Name:  Degree/Title:

Department:  Campus Phone:

Campus Address:

E-mail:  Fax #:

Responsible Graduate Student: (Person to contact for questions/problems with the form):

Name:  Campus Phone:

E-mail:

Does this project involve any collaborators not part of the faculty/staff at KSU? (projects with non-KSU collaborators may require additional coordination and approvals):

☒ No ☐ Yes

Project Classification (Is this project part of one of the following?):

☐ Thesis ☒ Dissertation ☐ Faculty Research

☐ Other:

**Note: Class Projects should use the short form application for class projects.**

Copy of the Consent Form: ☒ Copy will be submitted to comply@ksu.edu with this application ☐ Consent form not used

Funding Source: ☐ Internal ☐ External (Identify source. You will also need to provide a copy of the sponsor's grant application or contract as submitted to the funding agency. This should be submitted to comply@ksu.edu with your application.)

Based upon criteria found in 45 CFR 46 – and the overview of projects that may qualify for exemption explained at <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/checklists/decisioncharts.html>, I believe that my project using human subjects should be determined by the IRB to be exempt from IRB review:

☒ No ☐ Yes (If yes, please provide the category of "Exemption" in the space below)

**Exempt Projects:** 45 CFR 46 identifies six categories of research involving human subjects that may be exempt from IRB review. The categories for exemption are listed here: <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/checklists/decisioncharts.html#c2> If you believe that your project qualifies for exemption, please indicate which exemption category applies (1-6). Please remember that only the IRB can make the final determination whether a project is exempt from IRB review, or not.

Exemption Category:

**MODIFICATION:**

**Is this a modification of an approved protocol?** ☒ No ☐ Yes **If yes, please comply with the following:**

If you are requesting a modification or a change to an IRB approved protocol, please provide a concise description of all of the changes that you are proposing in the following block. Additionally, please highlight or bold the proposed changes in the body of the protocol where appropriate, so that it is clearly discernible to the IRB reviewers what and where the proposed changes are. This will greatly help the committee and facilitate the review.

**I. NON-TECHNICAL SYNOPSIS** (Please provide a brief narrative description of proposal. This should typically be less than 75 words and be easily understood by nonscientists):

People with language-based learning disabilities navigate their ways through PK-12 and higher education each year. However, there is a lack of information about how these students negotiate their educational path to have a career in the creative arts. This arts-based narrative inquiry case study will address the lack of information. The results may be used to improve services for students with learning disabilities throughout the educational systems of PK-12 and higher education.

**II. BACKGROUND** (concise narrative review of the literature and basis for the study):

Learning disability in higher education is not only poorly understood, but creates significant problems for students who have been identified as having such disabilities (Lovett, Nelson, & Lindstrom, 2015). Three key problems have been highlighted in higher education when it comes to learning disabilities (Miskovic & Gabel, 2012; Stage & Milne, 1996; & Wolf, 2011). These three problems include: a) students are responsible to self-disclose their disabilities and often do not because of a fear of being stigmatized, b) higher education lacks a consistent definition of disability, and c) there is a lack of understanding by faculty and staff at universities in terms of how to respond to the needs of students with learning disabilities.

Arts-based research is a method of inquiry used in many fields including education, therapy, and health research to enhance engagement by research participants and audiences (Boydell, Gladstone, Volpe, Allemang, & Stasiulis, 2012). Arts-based research has been defined by some as a systematic use of the artistic process to help understand and examine the artistic experience (Atkins, 2012). Yet, the artistic process is not to be understood as linear or causal. Instead, it is to be understood as reflexive, generative, and interpretive. Art as inquiry has many names in current literature; A/r/tography, arts-based research, arts-based inquiry, and Performative Social Science are only a few of the terms (Jones & Leavy, 2014; Leavy, 2015, Springgay & Irwin, 2005). Barone and Eisner (2011) state that "Arts-based research is an effort to extend beyond the limiting constraints of discursive communication in order to express meanings that otherwise would be ineffable" (p.1). In other words, information and meaning might not be as present or as effective in text-based discourses. Moreover, Leavy (2015) states, "Arts-based research practices are a set of methodological tools used by researchers across the disciplines during all phases of social research, including data generation, analysis, interpretation, and representation" (p. 4). Multilayered inquiry may be needed to create an expansive understanding and the creative genres can then be used as modes of inquiry, methodology, analysis, and representation.

Many helping professions, such as medicine, therapy, and education, understand the importance of using art as a way to help and serve those who are struggling in life. Art therapy is a valuable method of helping those with educational impairments to improve mental health and emotional well-being, encourage change from within, and self-awareness (Blomdahl, Gunnarsson, Guregård, & Björklund, 2013; Haeyen, van Hooren, & Hutschemaekers, 2015; What is art therapy?, 2013). The field of art therapy is "recognized for art-making allowed one to reframe experiences, reorganize thoughts, and gain personal insights that often enhanced one's quality of life. Art therapy has gained popularity because it combines free artistic expression with the potential for significant therapeutic intervention" (Konopka, 2014, p. 73). Among others, psychologists, therapists, and special educators are using the arts in practice due to healing, restorative, and empowering qualities (Leavy, 2015). For example, Leavy (2015) explains that there is an increase among health researchers and practitioners to explore the mental, psychological, and physical health improvements of dance and movement using arts-based research.

The purpose of this case study is to explore how two people with language-based learning disabilities, who have graduated from Masters of Fine Arts (MFA) programs describe their coping mechanisms, career aspirations, and identity development as a result of being involved in the creative arts.

**III. PROJECT/STUDY DESCRIPTION**

(Please provide a concise narrative description of the proposed activity in terms that will allow the IRB or other interested parties to clearly understand what it is that you propose to do that involves human subjects. This description must be in enough detail so that IRB members can make an informed decision about the proposal).

Participant solicitation and anonymity: The researcher will contact people with a MFA degree to find out if they have a language-based learning disability. If the person meets both of these criteria, they will be asked to participate in the study. If they agree, they will sign the consent form. Participants will participate in approximately three semi-structured interviews, create a creative arts bag portrait (See Appendix B for additional information), and share existing artwork and/or sketchbook with the researcher.



**IV. OBJECTIVE**

(Briefly state the objective of the research – what you hope to learn from the study).

The researcher plans to find out how two people with language-based learning disabilities, who have graduated from MFA programs describe their coping mechanisms, career aspirations, and identity development as a result of being involved in the creative arts.

**V. DESIGN AND PROCEDURES** (succinctly outline formal plan for study)

A. List all sites where this research will be conducted:

Interviews will take place in a private agreed upon location, such as an office.  
The participants will be allowed to decorate their creative arts bag project in their home or studio or other location.  
Interviews will last 30-60 minutes each.

B. Variables to be studied: This research will explore how two people with language-based learning disabilities, negotiated their paths through educational systems using their coping mechanisms to achieve their career aspirations in the creative arts.

C. Data collection methods: (surveys, instruments, etc - **copies must submitted to comply@k-state.edu**).

Open ended semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A)  
Creative Arts Bag Portrait (see Appendix B)  
Images of existing artwork and/or sketchbook (see Appendix C)

D. List any factors that might lead to a subject dropping out or withdrawing from a study. These might include, but are not limited to emotional or physical stress, pain, inconvenience, etc.

scheduling conflicts; inconvenience of meeting; participants may withdraw due to emotional distress associated with discussing their learning disability

E. List all biological samples taken: (if any)

N/A

F. Debriefing procedures for participants:

After each interview, the researcher will conduct peer debriefing sessions. Themes gathered from the research will be presented to the participants and checked for accuracy. Participants will also be given the opportunity to ask the researcher questions regarding the findings of the study. See section VII for complete statement.

**VI. RESEARCH SUBJECTS:**

A. Source:

The researcher has a large professional network of contacts that currently have MFA degrees. The researcher will reach out to the contacts by sending the recruiting email message to see if they meet the criteria. Based on the response to the message the researcher will ask for an informational meeting to explain the study in detail. If they are interested in participating, consent forms will be signed and the research will proceed. This process will continue expanding until the necessary number of participants is found.

B. Number: (provide a brief rationale for your sample size)

2; This is the number of participants the dissertation committee has agreed up to be sufficient for collecting indepth information for this case study.

C. Inclusion criteria: (List any unique qualifiers desirable for research subject participation)

Participants must be graduates of a Master's of Fine Arts program in an area of studio art. Additionally, the participants must have a documented language-based learning disability (documentation of a language-based learning disability could include an Individual Education Plan (IEP) from their PK-12 education, a 504 plan, or other similar documentation). Language-based learning disabilities include disorders in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in the understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think,

	<p>speak, read, write, and/or spell.</p>
D.	<p>Exclusion criteria: (list any unique disqualifiers for research subject participation)</p> <p>N/A</p>
E.	<p>Recruitment procedures:</p> <p>How will subjects be identified?</p> <p>The researcher has many professional contacts who currently have a MFA degree. The researcher will contact professionals that have this degree to find out if they meet the criteria of having a language-based learning disability and if they are interested in becoming a participant. The researcher has a large professional network of contacts that currently have MFA degrees. The researcher will reach out to the contacts by sending the recruiting email message to see if they meet the criteria. Based on the response to the message the researcher will ask for an informational meeting to explain the study in detail. If they are interested in participating, consent forms will be signed and the research will proceed. This process will continue expanding until the necessary number of participants is found.</p> <p>How will subjects be recruited (advertisement, associates, etc.) ?</p> <p>Criterion sampling will be used to select the participants. Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet predetermined criteria of importance to the researcher (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Patton, 2001), in this case, those involved will have a MFA degree and a language-based learning disability.</p> <p>How will subjects be enrolled?</p> <p>Subjects will consent to participation in the study, with the understanding that they can withdraw at anytime. Upon providing consent, subjects will be screened to determine that they have an MFA and a language-based learning disability.</p> <p>Describe any follow-up recruitment procedures: (reminder emails, mailings, etc.)</p> <p>Reminder emails or phone messages, depending on the participant preferred mode of communication will be used as follow-up recruitment procedures.</p>

**VII. RISK - PROTECTION - BENEFITS:** The answers for the three questions below are central to human subjects research. You must demonstrate a reasonable balance between anticipated risks to research participants, protection strategies, and anticipated benefits to participants or others.

**A. Risk for Subjects:** (check all that apply)

- ☐ Exposure to infectious diseases
- ☐ Use of confidential records
- ☐ Exposure to radiation
- ☐ Manipulation of psychological or social variables such as sensory deprivation, social isolation, psychological stressors
- ☐ Examining for personal or sensitive information in surveys or interviews
- ☐ Presentation of materials which subjects might consider sensitive, offensive, threatening, or degrading
- ☐ Invasion of privacy of subject or family
- ☐ Social or economic risk
- ☐ Risk associated with exercise or physical exertion
- ☐ Legal risk
- ☐ Review of medical records
- ☐ Review of criminal records
- ☐ HIV/AIDS or other STD's
- ☐ Employment/occupational risk
- ☐ Others – Please explain below (Indirect risks, risk to individuals who are not the primary subjects):

--



**B. Minimizing Risk:** (Describe specific measures used to minimize or protect subjects from anticipated risks.)

N/A

**C. Benefits:** (Describe any reasonably expected benefits for research participants, a class of participants, or to society as a whole.)

There is no direct benefits to the participants except self-reflections. This study can offer participants the chance to reflect on their progress through their educational path. Information collected may add to the literature of the area of study.

**D. More than Minimal Risk?** In your opinion, does the research involve more than minimal risk to subjects? ("Minimal risk" means that "the risks of harm anticipated in the proposed research are not greater, considering probability and magnitude, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.")☐ Yes☒ No**VIII. CONFIDENTIALITY:** Confidentiality is the formal treatment of information that an individual has disclosed to you in a relationship of trust and with the expectation that it will not be divulged to others without permission in ways that are inconsistent with the understanding of the original disclosure. Consequently, it is your responsibility to protect information that you gather from human research subjects in a way that is consistent with your agreement with the volunteer and with their expectations.

Explain how you are going to protect confidentiality of research subjects and/or data or records. Include plans for maintaining records after completion.

In this study, the researcher will take the following measures to ensure confidentiality:

1. A pseudonym will be used unless the participant requests their name be used.
2. If requested, no identifying information about the participants will ever be used in any format of presentation of research data. Participants will be able to review the transcripts and information. They may request any information be redacted and not shared.
3. All research data will be stored in password protected devices (iPad, recording device, and laptop computer)
4. Research records will be stored in a secure filing cabinet in the researcher's office.
5. Only the researcher will have access to any identifiable data related to the participant, which will be secured in a filing cabinet in the researcher's office in addition to password protected electronic files in the researcher's laptop and iPad.
6. Only the researcher will have access to the audio recordings and will conduct all transcriptions.
7. Any identifiable details shared in the course of the study will be fictionalized.
8. Three years after the conclusion of the study, the videos will be destroyed as per suggested qualitative research protocol.

Data will be shared dissertation major professor and committee members with the same standards of confidentiality.

**IX. INFORMED CONSENT:** Informed consent is a critical component of human subjects research - it is your responsibility to make sure that any potential subject knows exactly what the project that you are planning is about, and what his/her potential role is. (There may be projects where some forms of "deception" of the subject is necessary for the execution of the study, but it must be carefully justified to and approved by the IRB). A schematic for determining when a waiver or alteration of informed consent may be considered by the IRB is found at <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/checklists/decisioncharts.html#c10>

Even if your proposed activity does qualify for a waiver of informed consent, you must still provide potential participants with basic information that informs them of their rights as subjects, i.e. explanation that the project is research and the purpose of the research, length of study, study procedures, debriefing issues to include anticipated benefits, study and administrative contact information, confidentiality strategy, and the fact that participation is entirely voluntary and can be terminated at any time without penalty, etc. Even if your potential subjects are completely anonymous, you are obliged to provide them (and the IRB) with basic information about your project. See informed consent example on the URICO website. It is a federal requirement to maintain informed consent forms for 3 years after the study completion.

**Answer the following questions about the informed consent procedures.**☒ Yes☐ No

**A.** Are you using a written informed consent form? If "yes," include a copy with this application. If "no" see B.

☐ Yes ☒ No

**B.** In accordance with guidance in 45 CFR 46, I am requesting a waiver or alteration of informed consent elements (see section VIII above). If "yes," provide a basis and/or justification for your request.

☒ Yes ☐ No

**C.** Are you using the online Consent Form Template provided by the URCO? If "no," does your Informed Consent document have all the minimum required elements of informed consent found in the Consent Form Template? (Please explain)

☐ Yes ☒ No

**D.** Are your research subjects anonymous? If they are anonymous, you will not have access to any information that will allow you to determine the identity of the research subjects in your study, or to link research data to a specific individual in any way. Anonymity is a powerful protection for potential research subjects. (An anonymous subject is one whose identity is unknown even to the researcher, or the data or information collected cannot be linked in any way to a specific person).

☒ Yes ☐ No

**E.** Are subjects debriefed about the purposes, consequences, and benefits of the research? Debriefing refers to a mechanism for informing the research subjects of the results or conclusions, after the data is collected and analyzed, and the study is over. (If "no" explain why.) **Copy of debriefing statement to be utilized should be submitted to [comply@k-state.edu](mailto:comply@k-state.edu) with your application.**

Please see Appendix D for the statement.

**F. Describe the Informed Consent Process:**

Who is obtaining the consent? (i.e. Principle Investigator, Graduate Student, etc.)

The researcher (graduate student)

When and where will consent be obtained?

Informed consent will be first be obtained verbally and recoded prior to and again before each conducted interview and observation. Written informed consent will be completed prior to starting the first interview.

If assent (for minors) is required, please describe who will obtain the assent? (Assent means a child's affirmative agreement to participate in research)

N/A

If assent (for minors) is required, when and where will assent be obtained?

N/A

How will consent be obtained from non-English speaking participants? (a translated written form, orally, identify the name and qualifications of the individual providing the translation)

N/A

### **Informed Consent Checklist**

<b>Items</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>N/A</b>
Does the title appear at the top of the consent/assent form?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the consent/assent form written toward the subject?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a statement that explains that the study is <i>research</i> ?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a statement that explains the <i>purpose</i> of the research?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the procedures to be followed explained clearly and adequately?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the consent document describe <i>risks or discomforts</i> to subjects as a result of participating in the research?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the consent/assent form written in the <i>native language</i> of the potential subject?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are participants compensated?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If the subjects' identity is known to the PI, does the form detail how confidentiality of records will be maintained?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is contact information for both the PI and the URCO/IRB office included?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the consent document indicate to the participant that he/she can withdraw at any time from the project without penalty or loss of benefit?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there probable circumstances which would require the PI to terminate a subject's participation regardless of his or her consent?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the consent document written in lay language (Recommended 8th grade level)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**X. PROJECT INFORMATION:** (If you answer Yes to any of the questions below, you should explain them in one of the paragraphs above)

- ☐ Yes ☒ No A. Deception of subjects? If "YES" explain why this is necessary.
- ☐ Yes ☒ No B. Shock or other forms of punishment
- ☐ Yes ☒ No C. Sexually explicit materials or questions about sexual orientation, sexual experience or sexual abuse
- ☐ Yes ☒ No D. Handling of money or other valuable commodities
- ☐ Yes ☒ No E. Extraction or use of blood, other bodily fluids, or tissues (if "yes", you must comply with facility and handling protections detailed in the 5th Edition of the Biosafety in Biomedical Laboratories (BMBL))
- ☐ Yes ☒ No F. Questions about any kind of illegal or illicit activity
- ☐ Yes ☒ No G. Questions about protected health information as defined by HIPAA
- ☐ Yes ☒ No H. Purposeful creation of anxiety
- ☐ Yes ☒ No I. Any procedure that might be viewed as invasion of privacy
- ☐ Yes ☒ No J. Physical exercise or stress
- ☐ Yes ☒ No K. Administration of substances (food, drugs, etc.) to subjects
- ☐ Yes ☒ No L. Any procedure that might place subjects at risk
- ☐ Yes ☒ No M. Will there be any use of Radioactive materials and/or use of Radioactive producing machines
- ☐ Yes ☒ No N. Any form of potential abuse; i.e., psychological, physical, sexual
- ☒ Yes ☐ No O. Is there potential for the data from this project to be published in a journal, presented at a conference, etc?
- ☒ Yes ☐ No P. Use of surveys or questionnaires for data collection. **Copies should be submitted to comply@k-state.edu with your application.**

**XI. SUBJECT INFORMATION:** (If you answer yes to any of the questions below, you should explain them in one of the paragraphs above)

- |                              |  |    |   |
|------------------------------|--|----|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | a. | Under 18 years of age (these subjects require parental or guardian consent)   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | b. | Over 65 years of age  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | c. | Minorities as target population   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | d. | Physically or mentally disabled   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | e. | Economically or educationally disadvantaged   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | f. | Unable to provide their own legal informed consent  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | g. | Pregnant females as target population   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | h. | Victims   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | i. | Subjects in institutions (e.g., prisons, nursing homes, halfway houses)   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | j. | Are subjects likely to be vulnerable to coercion or undue influence   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | k. | Is this international research? If yes, provide details as to if OHRP regulations apply in or near the area you intend to conduct research or if you have contacted individuals for applicable regulations to human subject research. |

☐ Yes ☒ No

- l. Are research subjects in this activity students recruited from university classes or volunteer pools? If so, do you have a reasonable alternative(s) to participation as a research subject in your project, i.e., another activity such as writing or reading that would serve to protect students from unfair pressure or coercion to participate in this project? If you answered this question "Yes," explain any alternatives options for class credit for potential human subject volunteers in your study. (It is also important to remember that: Students must be free to choose not to participate in research that they have signed up for at any time without penalty. Communication of their decision can be conveyed in any manner, to include simply not showing up for the research.)

- ☒ Yes ☐ No m. Is audio from the subjects recorded? If yes, how do you plan to protect the recorded information and mitigate any additional risks?

All audio recordings, transcripts of interviews, research journals and notes, copies of documents, and artifacts will be kept on a password protected recording device, iPad and laptop computer. The researcher will be the only one with access to the password.

- ☐ Yes ☒ No n. Are research subjects' images being recorded (video taped, digitally recorded, photographed)? If yes, how do you plan to protect the recorded information and mitigate any additional risks?

**XII. FDA ACTIVITIES:** Answer the following questions about potential FDA regulated activities:

- |                              |  |    |   |
|------------------------------|--|----|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | a. | Is this a Clinical Trial?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | b. | Are you using an FDA approved drug/device/diagnostic test?  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | c. | Does this activity involve the use of FDA-Regulated products? (biological products, color additives, food additives, human drugs, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | d. | Has the protocol been submitted to the FDA, or are there plans to submit it to the FDA?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No | e. | Have you submitted an FDA form 3454 or 3455 (conflict of interest)?   |

**XIII. CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** Concerns have been growing that financial interests in research may threaten the safety and rights of human research subjects. Financial interests are not in themselves prohibited and may well be appropriate and legitimate. Not all financial interests cause Conflict of Interest (COI) or harm to human subjects. However, to the extent that financial interests may affect the welfare of human subjects in research, IRB's, institutions, and investigators must consider what actions regarding financial interests may be necessary to protect human subjects. Please answer the following questions:

- ☐ Yes ☒ No a. Do you or the institution have any proprietary interest in a potential product of this research, including patents, trademarks, copyrights, or licensing agreements?

- ☐ Yes    ☒ No    b. Do you have an equity interest in the research sponsor (publicly held or a non-publicly held company)?  
☐ Yes    ☒ No    c. Do you receive significant payments of other sorts, eg., grants, equipment, retainers for consultation and/or honoraria from the sponsor of this research?  
☐ Yes    ☒ No    d. Do you receive payment per participant or incentive payments?  
 e. If you answered **yes** to any of the above questions, please provide adequate explanatory information so the IRB can assess any potential COI indicated above.

#### XIV. PROJECT COLLABORATORS:

- A. KSU Collaborators:** List anyone affiliated with KSU who is collecting or analyzing data: (list all collaborators on the project, including co-principal investigators, undergraduate and graduate students).

Name:	Department:	Campus Phone:	Campus E-mail:
Betsy Crawford	Special Education	785-259-3959	betsy.crawford@ksu.edu

- B. Non-KSU Collaborators:** List all collaborators on your human subjects research project not affiliated with KSU in the spaces below. KSU has negotiated an Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), the federal office responsible for oversight of research involving human subjects.

Name:	Organization:	Phone:	Institutional E-mail:

- C. Does your non-KSU collaborator's organization have an Assurance with OHRP?** (for Federalwide Assurance listings of other institutions, please reference the OHRP website under Assurance Information at: <http://ohrp.cit.nih.gov/search>).

☐ Yes    ☐ No    If yes, Collaborator's FWA #

**Is your non-KSU collaborator's IRB reviewing this proposal?**

☐ Yes    ☐ No    If yes, IRB approval #

#### XV. IRB Training:

- A. The URCO must have a copy of the Unaffiliated Investigator Agreement on file for each non-KSU collaborator who is not covered by their own IRB and assurance with OHRP.** When research involving human subjects includes collaborators who are not employees or agents of KSU the activities of those unaffiliated individuals may be covered under the KSU Assurance only in accordance with a formal, written agreement of commitment to relevant human subject protection policies and IRB oversight. The Unaffiliated Investigators Agreement can be found and downloaded at <http://www.k-state.edu/research/comply/irb/forms>

**Online Training****\*TRAINING REQUIREMENTS HAVE RECENTLY CHANGED\***

The IRB has mandatory training requirements prior to protocol approval. Training is now offered through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program. Instructions for registration and access to training are on the URCO website <http://www.k-state.edu/research/comply/>.

Use the check boxes below to select the training courses that apply to this application. If you have any questions about training, contact URCO at [comply@ksu.edu](mailto:comply@ksu.edu), or (785) 532-3224.

**Mandatory Training****Required for all Principal Investigators, research staff and students**

- ☒ Responsible Conduct of Research  
☒ IRB core modules

**Required (Provost-mandated) for all full-time K-State employees**

- ☐ Export Compliance

**Required procedure-specific training (check all that apply to this protocol):**

- ☐ International Research      ☐ Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools      ☐ Research with Children  
☐ Research with Prisoners      ☐ Internet Research      ☐ Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees  
☐ Research with Subjects with Physical Disabilities and Impairments      ☐ Illegal Activities or Undocument Status in Human Research  
☐ Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Human Research      ☐ Research with human blood, body fluids, or tissues  
☐ Research with Older Adults

**All new personnel or personnel with expired training are required to register for CITI and take the new training requirements. If you previously completed online IRB modules, your training status will remain current until it expires. URCO will verify training from the previous system as well as the new system prior to approval of any protocol.**



## INVESTIGATOR ASSURANCE FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

(Print this page separately because it requires a signature by the PI.)

P.I. Name: Dr. Warren White

Title of Project: Arts-Based Narrative Inquiry: Experiences of Negotiating Educational Systems with a Language-Based Learning Disability to Achieve a Career in the Creative Arts

XVI. **ASSURANCES:** As the Principal Investigator on this protocol, I provide assurances for the following:

- A. **Research Involving Human Subjects:** This project will be performed in the manner described in this proposal, and in accordance with the Federalwide Assurance FWA00000865 approved for Kansas State University available at <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/assurances/forms/filasurt.html>, applicable laws, regulations, and guidelines. Any proposed deviation or modification from the procedures detailed herein must be submitted to the IRB, and be approved by the Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) prior to implementation.
- B. **Training:** I assure that all personnel working with human subjects described in this protocol are technically competent for the role described for them, and have completed the required IRB training accessed via the URCO website at: <http://www.k-state.edu/research/comply/irb/training>. I understand that no proposals will receive final IRB approval until the URCO has documentation of completion of training by all appropriate personnel.
- C. **Extramural Funding:** If funded by an extramural source, I assure that this application accurately reflects all procedures involving human subjects as described in the grant/contract proposal to the funding agency. I also assure that I will notify the IRB/URCO, the KSU PreAward Services, and the funding/contract entity if there are modifications or changes made to the protocol after the initial submission to the funding agency.
- D. **Study Duration:** I understand that it is the responsibility of the Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) to perform continuing reviews of human subjects research as necessary. I also understand that as continuing reviews are conducted, it is my responsibility to provide timely and accurate review or update information when requested, to include notification of the IRB/URCO when my study is changed or completed.
- E. **Conflict of Interest:** I assure that I have accurately described (in this application) any potential Conflict of Interest that my collaborators, the University, or I may have in association with this proposed research activity.
- F. **Adverse Event Reporting:** I assure that I will promptly report to the IRB / URCO any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others that involve the protocol as approved. Unanticipated or Adverse Event Form is located on the URCO website at: <http://www.k-state.edu/research/comply/irb/forms>. In the case of a serious event, the Unanticipated or Adverse Events Form may follow a phone call or email contact with the URCO.
- G. **Accuracy:** I assure that the information herein provided to the Committee for Human Subjects Research is to the best of my knowledge complete and accurate.

You may sign this form using a digital signature. DO NOT sign the form until it has been completed.

You cannot edit the form entries once the form has been digitally signed. If you are making revisions to a previously signed form, right-click the digital signature and select Clear to remove the signature (this can only be done by the person who originally digitally signed the form). Forms that have not been signed will not be accepted.

P.I. Signature:

Date:

## **Appendix C - Debriefing Statement**

Thank you for your participation in this study on the ways in people language-based learning disabilities with MFA degrees negotiate educational systems. The interviews, creative arts bag portrait, and artwork/sketchbook were to increase knowledge in this area. The goal of the interviews was to gather information about the how people with language-based learning disabilities negotiate education systems. Through the information gathered in the interviews, themes about service of students were developed. Some themes identified as a result of this research includes: boxed in, lighting up when plugged in, agency, excess baggage and superpower.

Final results will be available from the researcher, Betsy Crawford, by August 30, 2017. You may contact me at [betsycrawford@ksu.edu](mailto:betsycrawford@ksu.edu) to receive an email copy of the final report.

If you would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact my professor: Dr. Warren White, [wwhite@ksu.edu](mailto:wwhite@ksu.edu). Also, you may contact the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board: Dr. Rick Scheidt, Chair Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects or Dr. Jerry Jaax, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance and University Veterinarian. They are both located in 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506 and the telephone number is 785-532-3224.

Because the researcher does not know the community the participants will live in yet, it is hard to make these resources available at this time. However, once the participants have been selected, the researcher will prepare a list of therapists, mental health facilities or other similar resources that are available locally to each of the participants.



## **Appendix D - Creative Arts Bag Portrait**

For this research, the participants will be given a paper bag to create their creative arts bag portrait. As mentioned, to avoid any cost to the participants the researcher will provide some art supplies for them to borrow, if they choose. Participants will be given at least four days to complete the project. Participants will be given a paper bag on which they will create a portrait of themselves they will be encouraged to think about their educational journey through PK-12 and higher education. On one side of the bag will be a reflection of the person that they project to the world. On the other side will be a reflection of the person that they perhaps keep hidden from the world. Inside the bag, the participant will keep objects, items, memorabilia, pictures, or anything else they deem relevant that connects them to their experiences of navigating their path of having a learning disability, inspires them to do what they do, and their experiences as a creative artist. All items put in the bag will be returned to the participant at the end of the interview.

To align with the purpose of this project, participants will be asked to share responses to the following questions:

- what are your educational experiences relating to learning disabilities?
- how do you connect your identity development about learning disabilities to your artwork?
- what kinds of outcomes you expect from your artwork? (Bhattacharya, 2015a)

Once the creative arts bag portrait is completed, the participant and the bag portrait will meet to discuss the bag. The participants will be encouraged to share about themselves and the bag. The bag will prompt the researcher to ask questions that the researcher likely would have not thought of without this visual and/or object elicitation.

## **Appendix E - Artwork/Sketchbook Information**

Because I want to further personalize the interview process, having the participants share existing artwork and/or sketchbooks that have meaning to them within the context of the research topic will allow me to explore their experiences from a different perspective and, perhaps, a deeper and more personal level. For these interviews, I will ask the participants to do the following:

1. Share their artwork and/or sketchbook that may have meaning to them in the context of the research topic.
2. Talk about the significance of the artwork/sketchbook in reference to the meaning of the research project.
3. With permission images of the objects will be taken.

## Appendix F - Cross Comparison Table

	Declan	Josephine
book for thesis show	Created a series of artwork in the form of a children's story book for thesis show	Created and published a children's book for thesis show
Support from some teachers	Supportive teachers in elementary school	Supportive professors in college
Anxiety	Nervousness with speaking or reading aloud	More generalized anxiety, especially with critique and exams
Parents	Supportive and went to great lengths to help	Mom understood some of the learning problems but did not know how to help
Relied on friends/classmates	Help from others in graphic design program	Had a friend Gina that proofread all of her work
Maturation	Stayed in familiar school for graduate school before entering the job force	Took nine years to finish BA degree
Growth	Seemed slower than peers	Seemed slower than peers
View of disability now	Would prefer not to have it but has learned to see it as a superpower	Would prefer not to have it but has learned to see it as a way to see beauty that would not be seen otherwise
Isolation	Felt isolated when he had to spend more time working on projects throughout school	Felt isolated throughout life and still spends a lot of time alone in the studio because her work required time in isolation to be done
Degrees	BA, MFA	BA, MA, MFA

Doubt	Throughout life especially in school	Throughout life especially in school, Still has major doubts about intelligence sometimes now
Current job	Teaching at community college; little work outside of college	Teaching workshops, keeps many galleries supplied with her work
Coping with dyslexia	Working with tutor, IEP with support, support in college, extended time, exams in another location, notes in advance, help from peers, mom helped with hooked on phonics, takes extra time to complete reading and written work.	support in college, extended time, exams in another location, instructors helped her figured out she had dyslexia and issues with her eyes, friend helped edit papers, takes extra time to complete reading and written work.
Negotiated education	Avoided courses with a large amount of writing, got help when required from educational setting or peers	Avoided courses with a large amount of writing, got help when required from friend